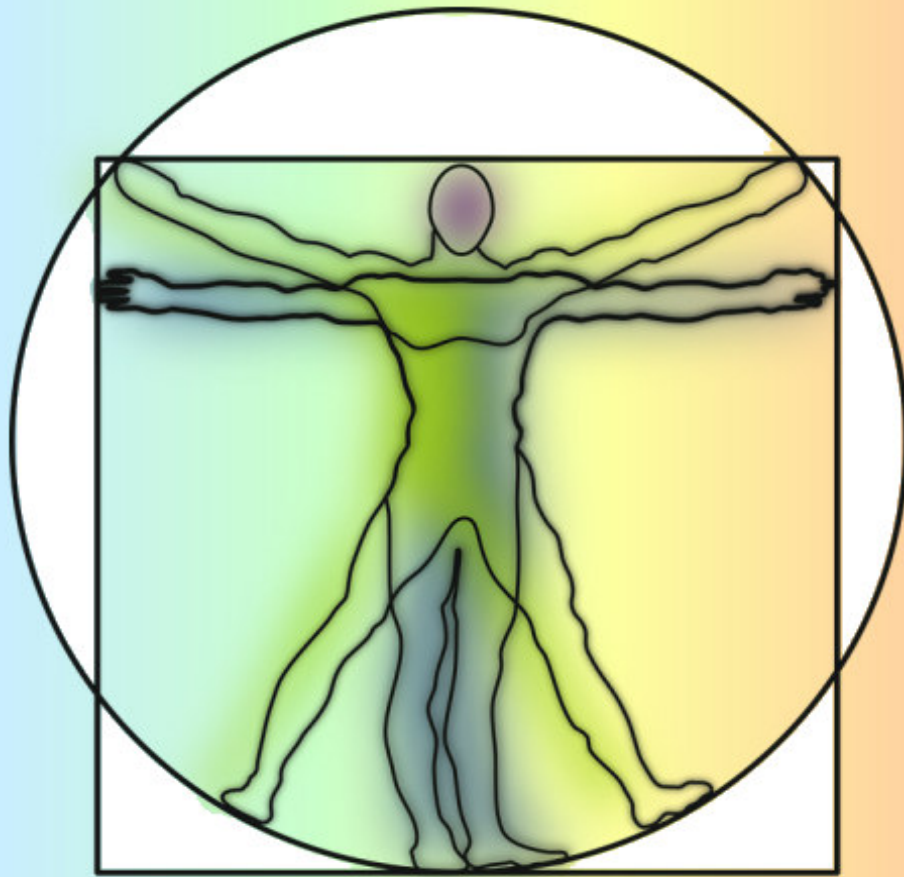
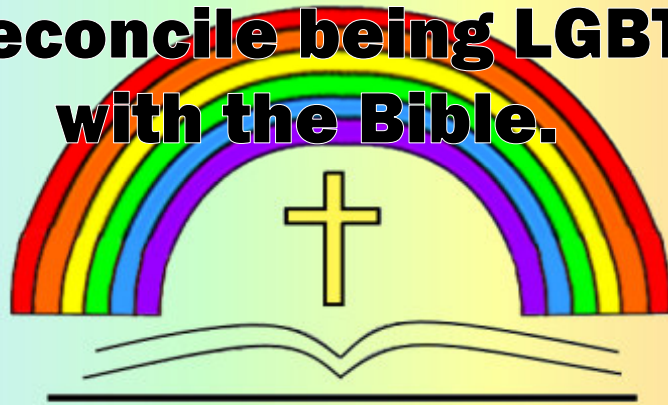


**Changing Minds:-
A Thorough Exploration of the Issues:
To Reconcile being LGBTQ+
with the Bible.**



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Notes:

Throughout the essay, some quotes – especially the short ones - have had their spellings Anglicised, so that your eyes are drawn to the content, not the language differences! But be warned, not all, (perhaps not many!) have received this treatment!

Changing Minds:- A Thorough Exploration of the Issues: To Reconcile being LGBTQ+ with the Bible.

An essay by: Peter Johnson

– Chapter 1 –

Setting The Scene – Where Do We Find Ourselves Today?

In January 2015, I began an essay to resolve my dilemma about how I believe Jesus views those in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. I thought it could run to perhaps as much as 20 pages, but how wrong was I? This essay has changed many times since then. Has it improved? It is certainly more complete.

Usually, the author will try and hide what they really feel until much later in the piece, but I need to issue a spoiler alert, because I must start by saying that this essay has resulted in a fundamental shift in my thinking that has seen me effectively switch sides. My story doesn't demand that you switch sides as well, but is simply saying that "this is why *I* believe *I* was previously wrong" but also asks you to examine what you think, why you think it, and is it consistent with Scripture - assuming you have a faith in Jesus as Lord.

If you disagree with my theology at the end, please continue to respect those, like me, who have chosen to affirm those who find themselves in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex community, before God. I'm issuing this spoiler at the beginning because it is difficult to write impassively and then reveal my hand at the end. I tried in one version of this document, but it simply didn't work, because you'd quickly guess by the questions I ask, and maybe by the tone of the piece. I can relax more if there are no secrets being kept, and you won't feel betrayed, if you know my stance from the first page – and if you don't like your theology being challenged, it gives you the option to stop reading right here!

As C.S. Lewis writes at the end of his Preface to "Mere Christianity":

"When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong, they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house".

Mere Christianity, London: Collins, 1952.

If you are part of the LGBTQ+ community, I trust I will represent your situation accurately. I have tried to listen hard to my friends in the community, as well as other writers and communicators who are writing and speaking as part of the community. Please forgive me if I have got a few things wrong.

Why am I writing down my thoughts? Firstly, it has always been the way I deal with troubling issues, so that I can resolve them dispassionately, having stepped back, listed the pro's and con's, and looked at all sides of the argument. I have done this

when changing jobs and when I have had problems with people or churches over the years, but it looks like all those documents have been destroyed, so those skeletons are nothing but dust in the cupboard.

Secondly, for several decades I have had an unease about how I and the church treated homosexuality, but never felt strongly enough to closely look at the issue, until a couple of situations forced me to confront it head-on. As Rev Dr Mel White writes in "Stranger At The Gate - To Be Gay And Christian In America":

We ... grew up surrounded by well-meaning, Bible-believing Christians who had never really tried to understand in our modern context the ancient passages used now to condemn homosexuality. In those days, we were all victims of blind, unreasoned fear and hatred of homosexuality that had been passed down generation after generation without much thought and almost no careful historical, cultural, or linguistic study of the ancient biblical record, let alone of the new data being gathered by the medical, scientific, and psychological communities.

We didn't know the difference between sexual "preference" and sexual "orientation". We thought homosexuals were perverted heterosexuals who chose for some "sick reason" to have sex with men. We didn't realize that homosexuals were mysteriously imprinted with the need for same-sex intimacy and affiliation in their mothers' wombs or in the first few years of childhood, and that, try as they might, their sexuality, like heterosexuality, was a permanent condition.

- P147. Stranger At The Gate - To Be Gay And Christian In America - Plume books (Penguin Group)

However, my problem was that if we take the Bible literally at face value, this group of people could only be gay (or whatever) because they had chosen to be, yet if God made them that way, how could He then condemn their behaviour?

For me, though, as I got to know and observe people in this community personally, it became quite clear that Moses and Paul could not possibly have been referring to them in their writings, and that God could not be condemning them for just simply being the people He had "called into being", in the first place. Hence, I/we must go back to Scripture and check the passages again, because if there is condemnation, He/they (Moses and Paul) must be talking about something very different, otherwise our theological problems are huge.

My new friends, and the stories they told, often with a lump in their throat, and tears in their eyes, convinced me the idea of 'choice' just didn't figure. No-one who has any sort of relationship with anyone in the LGBTQ+ community, will think otherwise. Almost by definition, if you still think choice is involved, you obviously haven't spent any real time with anyone in the community. I will deal with the issue of choice in much more detail later.

In this document I have used logic as a method to answer some of the problems I faced. Many Bible characters including Moses, Paul and Jesus applied logic to situations. In fact, anywhere where the text reads "if, then ...", logic is being applied. So, God says *"If Mankind ..., I will ..."* According to a favourite search engine, the word "if" appears 1,595 times in 1,420 different verses of the King James Bible. I must be fair and say that they are obviously not all necessarily in the formula I've used above, though there are many occasions where it does. Hence, if God and the Bible writers use logic, I feel it is an entirely appropriate tool to use as I try to resolve the issues at hand.

Logic was a tool C.S. Lewis used in his writings. There is a scene in the "Chronicles of Narnia", where Lucy is thought to either be lying, or going mad, after her second, and Edmund's first visit to Narnia. Peter and Susan talk to the Professor about their concerns. C.S. Lewis writes: *'Logic!' said the Professor half to himself. 'Why don't they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth.'* (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.) This is an illustration of Ockham's Razor – the simplest explanation is often the most likely explanation.

This is a simplification of what has been referred to as "Lewis's trilemma" which is his comment on whether Jesus is Lord, where he writes in "Mere Christianity":

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God'. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

Mere Christianity, London: Collins, 1952, (All editions: Bk. II, Ch.3 ("The Shocking Alternative.")). This is the final paragraph.

So yes, I will appeal to logic as it is entirely reasonable so to do!

Just then we talked about the Lordship of Jesus. As I wandered through many documents and books, I wondered about my theology, and whether and how it should change. I came across many others asking the same questions. In a piece

for the Baptist Times dated 19th April 2016, Rev Joe Haward of This Hope Baptist Church in Newton Abbot, wrote:

It is Jesus whom we encounter in the Garden on resurrection morning, not Adam. Humanity then, is not marching towards some Edenic past, rather it is released into a Christological future, beckoned towards its goal in who Jesus is, the True Human. Or as some of the Church Fathers put it, 'He became what we are so that we might become what he is.' Therefore, any discussion surrounding humanness and sexuality should be grounded in the Person of Jesus and who it is He is making us to be.

Perfection then was never found in the "male and female" and the distinctions we have, it is found in Christ. Whereas before Christ our relationships were determined by the Law, differentiations determined by social and ethnic distinctions, now, in Christ, our relationships are a sign of redemption, a glimpse of the redemptive power of God, a 'new creation' where the old order of things have passed away.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/465692/Human_sexuality_and.aspx

Because this project has become huge and unwieldy, I have created an 'Additional Information' section at the back. In this I have added information from some chapters that I found interesting, but that lengthened the basic document even further. So, if you want to read more about the subject of the chapter check out that additional section and then the resource list at the end.

Just now I used (and will continue to use) the term LGBTQ+. This is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, Queer and ... all the others I'm about to mention. Frequently we use the acronym LGBT, but many folks also add 'Q' for 'Queer', and also 'I' for the intersexed, and much more rarely 'TS' or '2S' for 'Twin/Two Spirit', so it is conceivable you may come across LGBTIQTS in certain resources. I have also come across LGBTQQIAAP which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Allies and Pansexual; as well as LGBTQQIP2SAA: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirit (2S), Androgynous, and Asexual. These alternatives are to intentionally include and raise awareness of these other communities. Whilst I honour these other communities, the variants differ so much, and I wouldn't want to include one group and fail to include another. So, for this work, I believe it to be more helpful to simply use the acronym LGBTQ+.

By way of clarity, let's define those major terms we'll be using (the ones I don't define, you can look up for yourself).

Throughout the essay I tend to use 'Homosexual' only when I must, and when used it covers both 'Gay' or 'Lesbian'. Normally I will try to use the expression 'Gay and Lesbian', and then 'Gay' or 'Lesbian', where the context dictates ('Gay' being a male who is attracted to other males, but not to females; and 'Lesbian' being a female who is attracted to other females, but not to males. Please note however, that frequently lesbians will talk about themselves as being 'Gay', so just watch your

step!). I have tried to avoid the word, but I know many 'Gays' and 'Lesbians' hate the term 'homosexual', but there are places where I need an overarching word to cover both, as well as being able to refer to 'gays' and 'lesbians' in their own right, so I hope you can go with the spirit of the document. I could have used the term 'same-sex' relationship, but I have found that of the documents I have read where this term is used, the documents themselves are either 'legal' in nature, or intrinsically critical of, or hostile to, lesbian and gay relationships. In addition, none of the primary Christian gay and lesbian websites (OneBodyOneFaith, Q Christian Fellowship, Christian Gays, Gay Christian Survivors, Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians, Accepting Evangelicals) use this term, as it is regarded as unacceptable, possibly offensive, and I have chosen not to walk that path either. If the climate changes, I will endeavour to replace the terms where needed.

In addition, I generally use the term Trans to refer to both Trans-sexual and Transgender (it will also save making a transman/transwoman distinction), since some folks will recognise or prefer one term and not the other. [Those familiar with searching on computers will be familiar with the * wildcard symbol. Some of the documents I refer to make use of this motif, so that instead of writing Trans-sexual/Transgender/Transman/Transwoman they write Trans*. I have decided to simply use the word "Trans" to cover all choices.] I am using the term to understand that a person may have been born with the physical appearance of male or female but regard themselves as being the opposite gender – having always felt distant from the physical gender they were assigned. I also want to make a personal observation here that during my research I have found the term "transgender" used more commonly than "transsexual" and I personally suspect it is to get away from any mistaken notion that the condition is 'sexual' by nature, but more to do with identity. However, as I have already indicated, I have used trans throughout this essay, to reflect everyone, regardless of their preferred 'distinction'.

One more thing, I have avoided using the term Transgenderism because: *"Using the term "transgenderism" is offensive. This terminology frames transgender issues as an ideology, a philosophy, or a political agenda. By using the word "transgenderism," people are reduced to an opinion and it's easy to dismiss opinions. Whether an outside party "thinks" someone is transgender, or can or should be, is not up for the debate of a disinterested party. The correct terminology is transgender issues or just transgender people"*.

<http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-transgenderism-by-owen-strachan-and-gavin-peacock-a-book-review/> Hopefully that has covered all the bases!

'Queer' is an umbrella term to cover all gender ambiguous folk, and as I understand it, re-appropriated in recent years to make it more ambiguous as to which camp they are a part of. Why? Perhaps, because it is none of my business which gender you identify as. Some people prefer to simply identify as 'queer', and I want to honour and respect them.

We are probably fairly familiar with those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and intersex, but what about two-spirit? Wikipedia describes 'Two-Spirit' people as:

*"Two-spirit people (also two spirit or twospirit) is a modern umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans for gender variant individuals in their communities. Non-Native anthropologists have historically used the term **berdaches** /bərˈdæʃɪz/ for individuals who fulfil one of many mixed gender roles in First Nations and Native American tribes, but this term has more recently fallen out of favour. Third and fourth gender roles historically embodied by two-spirit people include performing work and wearing clothing associated with both men and women. Not all tribes have rigid gender roles. Among those that do, some tribes consider there to be at least four genders:*

- masculine men
- feminine men
- masculine women
- feminine women.

*The presence of male-bodied two-spirits "was a fundamental institution among most tribal peoples." (Gilley, Brian Joseph (2006: 8). *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country*. ISBN 0-8032-7126-3) According to Will Roscoe, male-bodied and female-bodied two-spirits have been "documented in over 130 North America tribes, in every region of the continent." (Roscoe, Will (1991). *The Zuni Man-Woman*, p.5. ISBN 0-8263-1253-5.)*

We need to understand peoples who identify as two-spirit commonly appear to be Australian First Nation peoples and Native American/First Nation peoples (USA & Canada), born either as man or woman, but with an indeterminate sexual identity, such that they are happy to dress as either a man or woman as they choose, because they are relaxed in that identity. The history of this stretches back to pre-Colonial days. In our "Western" society permeated with a perceived "Christian" morality, we are not familiar or comfortable with these gender types, so have ended up with our traditionally male and female gender types and anyone else is lumped into the LGBTQ+ category as a device, so we can hopefully ignore or forget about them. We love the premise that if we can't see it, it doesn't exist! Until recently both society and Church ostracised anyone who felt they didn't belong in the gender-type our society had given them, but nowadays society is more willing to acknowledge the issues, but sadly the church, instead of leading society, lags a long, long way behind.

In talking about two-spirit peoples, there is a helpful article on the Portland Mercury website that gives a history of this group of people, which gives more of an impression of what we understand to be gay and lesbian behaviour. For a while it was on the Christian Gay website, but seems to have been removed:

<http://www.portlandmercury.com/portland/two-spirits-rising/Content?oid=24792>.

The article written by John Dooley was originally posted in June 2001. If you are

interested in learning more about those who identify as two-spirit, there is a lot of information available online.

As is perfectly clear, this is not cross-dressing for sexual gratification, but as part of a gender fluid expression of identity. This is not Trans. Trans peoples appear to be one gender, but identify as another, whereas indigenous two spirit peoples see themselves as having **both** male and female spirits. I may be wrong, but it seems similar to being gender queer or gender fluid, except that in western culture the maleness and femaleness is 'played down' rather than embraced. Because two-spirit folks have a foot in both female and male camps, they are often honoured as shamen, or the like, as they can intercede with the spirits.

We can't look for simplistic stereotypes and one pigeon-hole to place them all, but to look at each in turn, and see what we can learn.

In my conversations with folks in the LGBTQ+ community, and as I watch documentaries looking at this area, I find people who have been greatly troubled during their formative years, because they were made to feel they didn't belong, because they didn't fit into either the male or female stereotype. Many have wrestled with guilt, especially if they are people of faith, but not exclusively so. Most do not want to be different to those around them and hate the attention it brings – they simply want to be left alone to get on with life without any fuss. This is in stark contrast with the two-spirited, who seem to have been deeply honoured by the tribes they served, who, in turn, were proud of them. I believe we must learn from them.

Whilst this document is dealing with those identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, we perhaps also need to make reference to those who are asexual, especially as they are often included in the extended form of the acronym. The term 'asexual' refers "... to individuals with low or absent sexual desire or attractions, low or absent sexual behaviors, exclusively romantic non-sexual partnerships, or a combination of both absent sexual desires and behaviors." (Nicole Prause; Cynthia A. Graham (August 2004). "Asexuality: Classification and Characterization" Archives of Sexual Behavior.)

Why do I mention this group? Christians, in the main, would probably not even give this group a second thought at all, because they are not getting up to anything perceived as 'naughty' so they don't cause any problem! Yet, privately, it is likely this group of individuals, and their spouses/partners, are going through a very real and similar 'hell' to those in the LGBTQ+ community – that of being different and of being unable to feel something they feel they ought, and wishing they could be different, whilst their partners have the agony of longing for intimacy, which is never, or rarely, or cannot, be fulfilled. In fact, probably this is an identical tension, simply with a different endpoint. Try to understand the loneliness and tension of unfulfilled intimacy. How does that bless God who has made us to be in relationship with others?

Christians – certainly in their public attitudes - tend to view sex as bad, and abstinence, or celibacy as good – except they can't live up to that standard

individually themselves, and there is a kind of Dualistic or Gnostic worldview involved. Physical = Bad. Spiritual = Good. Not only is this true of sex, but everything else: we are told that as Christians we must suffer for the Kingdom. So that means that anything good and enjoyable, must be bad, and everything bad, must be good for our souls! So, we can't enjoy good food ("Besides, it is wasteful – and some people don't even get a bowl of rice!"), you can't go with your mates to watch football ("You're supposed to be at a Bible Study or Prayer meeting"), you can't enjoy Rock music ("If you need music, play something like Praise or Worship music – something centred on God"), you can't enjoy science fiction books or television ("Come on can't you find a good Christian book to read – maybe the life of CT Studd, or a book about prayer?"). Jesus didn't command us to be ascetics, but to enjoy His Creation. If you go away and do some homework on Gnosticism you will see that this is idolatry, and therefore condemned by God. By distinction, God looks at the whole person and doesn't split people up into different parts. God called all His creation, "Good", and our turning our faces against it because we think it's wrong, is very bad theology. How can you say something God created is bad?

The more time you spend looking at the area of sexuality and gender, the more you realise that both areas are a spectrum. Even the most fixed-view, non-affirming person will concede that some men are highly masculine and others quite feminine, and that you also have some very feminine women, and some quite masculine women. We talk about the autism spectrum, and how different people fit different parts of it, and sexuality is no different - it's just that we have been brought up with a fixed stereotype, and so we feel uncomfortable when we are faced with something we are not used to, something that questions what we perceive to be our faith at its root.

So, you will already appreciate that this area is complex, and the more complicated the situation becomes, the more important it is to bring God's grace into the situation. The LGBTQ+ community are saying, "You and your Bible have nothing to say to us, because you keep telling us we have been rejected." The theology Christians frequently use is suspect, if not downright wrong. The thinking goes like this: If Hitler had repented of his sins, God would have forgiven him. However, homosexuals cannot be forgiven because forgiveness requires repentance, and this necessitates a turning away from the path currently being followed. Because gay folk continue to live in a homosexual relationship, they can't be serious about repentance, so forgiveness is denied. The rationale is, if when I die, I have unforgiven sin, I'm destined for hell, so gay Christians don't have a chance.

So then, what about that Christian who asks God for forgiveness, and half an hour later gets angry, and doesn't have time to ask for forgiveness before a stroke/heart attack/bus takes them out. Technically they've died with unrepented sin. What about the gay/lesbian Christian who is not in a relationship, because they just haven't met the right person? They may not be 'actively homosexual', but they are innately – it's not for lack of effort. Are they doomed? The phrase 'active homosexual' is daft. It makes it sound like gays and lesbians are permanently

enjoying sex, when there is no evidence that they enjoy sex any more frequently than the rest of us. So, are they condemned because of their nature or orientation, or for the act of intimacy? The Bible is of no help here, because it doesn't make it clear. If we use Jesus' standard, that thinking lustful thoughts is as bad as acting on them, then being gay or lesbian by orientation will be enough to bring condemnation, so living a celibate lifestyle will be futile. If it is that the act of intimacy is the problem, the next chapter will raise some questions.

Is God not Just, Merciful and all-knowing? Is His Son not the Great Shepherd of the sheep who will go after the one who is lost and carry them back on His shoulder, because they can't do it for themselves. Are you seriously saying that being gay or lesbian is worse than Hitler? Its bonkers theology! It hasn't been thought through. If God's Grace is what we claim, we **must** find a way for it to say something to the LGBTQ+ community. I don't mean that we invent a fictitious theology to wriggle round the issue (**that** would be offensive to God), but we must re-read the Bible and seriously ask whether we have understood it correctly. We will come back to this issue later.

I mentioned the 'sex' word just now. I know that some Christians view the supposed 'wrongness' of gay sex is because they think only Gay men participate in anal sex. However, the statistics may surprise you.

From the US study, **National Health Statistics Reports, Number 36 - March 3, 2011**, it claims **anal sex occurs more frequently within relationships of straight couples than same-sex couples**. That information is hugely significant. It is quite a surprise, and kicks the legs away from many prejudices, we as Christians hold. That paper reported that:

... 36% of women and 44% of men ever had anal sex with an opposite-sex partner. Twice as many women aged 25–44 (12%) reported any same-sex contact in their lifetimes compared with men (5.8%). – *Sexual Behavior, Sexual Attraction, and Sexual Identity in the United States: Data From the 2006–2008 National Survey of Family Growth*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr036.pdf>

Let's be cautious though. There is clearly some spin in the reporting of the article. The important thing, though, is that percentages don't matter, the point is that anal sex is not the exclusive purview of gay men, therefore if our anti-gay theology is largely built on that supposition, the house of cards tumbles. A key point is that the Bible doesn't mention anal sex, so the Bible doesn't express a view on it, so you can't jump up and down about it. Some will say: "Ah yes, but the Bible says...." I'm not trying to doubt Scripture, I want to fully understand it, but my answer is "WHY does the Bible say that? WHAT is the Bible trying to address, or stop? If someone has a birth characteristic, you can't blame them for that?"

It is likely that people with obvious birthmarks would not have been able to serve as priests in the original temple, because they would not have been regarded as physically perfect. So, let's say that if God were to bar people with birthmarks from

His Kingdom, wouldn't you want to know why? Obviously, He doesn't, but I'm just making a point.

It is **imperative** that we know why the Bible says what we think it says. What is it addressing? And if the supposed 'sin' is being practiced regularly by those in a different category, and we turn a blind eye to it, what hypocrites we are! We'll come back to these questions later.

At a very superficial level the Bible seems to be clearly set against the LGBTQ+ community, and by raising questions that challenge that modern cultural understanding, folk think we are threatening the integrity of the Bible itself. They are therefore tremendously fearful about what we are doing, and consequently become very defensive. Another fear verbalised to me, was that: "might I be re-writing scripture for my own convenience?" I'm not, but we need to be brave and prepared to look at every passage of Scripture, applying the filter of what is consistent with God's Word as revealed to us in the teachings of Jesus. We need to be able to tell the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. (1 Corinthians 12: 3.)

To bring in theology right at the beginning, God cannot Create anything without loving it, and calling it good, so our friends who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and anyone else (LGBTQ+), are loved by God, even if they are not by most churches, sadly. When God calls into being a sparrow, the little bird behaves like a sparrow, because it is one. God made it and called it "Good". It doesn't bark. It is a sparrow and lives in accordance with God's plan for sparrows. When God calls into being a slug, it doesn't jump like a grasshopper, but follows God's call to be the best slug it can be – we may not like it at times, but it's a slug following God's directive. Some animals can be trained to do things we find amusing or useful, but they can only be trained to refine an ability they already have and use it in a specialized way. You can't train a parrot to dive for fish.

In May 2018 Tony Campolo was in conversation with Premier Christianity's editor Sam Hailes on Premier Radio (The 39-min Podcast can be downloaded here: <https://www.podbean.com/site/EpisodeDownload/PB9182674URFP>), and as part of the wide-ranging interview, he talked about the word "Raca" which Jesus refers to in his sermon on the mount. It was a word he had been exploring with theologian friends, and so was fresh in his mind when he was being interviewed. I personally always understood it to be a term of contempt or abuse, although in the context, it isn't hugely offensive, whereas "You fool!" because it is often accompanied by anger has the added jeopardy. The Matthew 5 passage says:

²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Tony Campolo explained that anything that diminishes the dignity of another human being is 'Raca'. So, if you have an attitude that diminishes the dignity of someone else, for example about a person's race, skin colour, if they are a refugee/asylum seeker, if you put down women, and of course issues around

gender and sexuality – all are examples of ‘Raca’. It is difficult to pick a modern word in place of “Raca”, because it looks like it is as much the **way** the word (the tone of voice, and perhaps the facial expression) is used, as much as the word itself.

We all understand that the Bible says that Homosexuals cannot enter heaven (though interestingly, not mentioning lesbians, despite there always, historically, having been some form of lesbian activity whether ritualised, or not). As an aside, when looking at the Bible and trying to understand it, we cannot automatically attach the word *lesbian* to the word *homosexuality*, when that word appears in the text, because that would be adding something to Scripture that isn’t there. Can’t do it – don’t do it! It is bad and lazy theology! The word for ‘homosexuality’ in the Biblical text, always takes the masculine form. So, Lesbianism gets a free ride, (except one passage by Paul, and that one is highly suspect) and that is part of my problem with the current thinking of much of the church.

Superficially, this group of people don’t seem to have much of a chance. Their choice is to live a lie - a life of denial of who they are, which itself conflicts with other Biblical principles. Besides, this denial (hiding what they are), frequently results in severe stress-related conditions – again something which shouldn’t happen if it were a requirement by God (“my yoke is easy and my burden light”). This is not part of our denying ourselves and following the cross in accordance with Biblical teaching. That would be to grievously misunderstand and misuse Scripture to bolster our own self-righteousness at the expense of others.

Another alternative is enforced celibacy, which, unless it is a vocation, has never worked. This requirement too, seems to fly in the face of a good number of God’s character traits. This is a problem because with no choice, they can’t change, and so from a Traditional non-affirming viewpoint, they can have no hope of salvation. So, I come back to my original conundrum – God’s character. Did he really create a group of people solely to be treated as “Raca” by society, and sadly the church? Did he make them solely destined to live lives of frustration, with no hope of change?

We believe that what God creates, he considers, “Good”, and is “well-pleased” with His work. So, when He creates someone who is gay, He looks on them and says He is well-pleased. (You have a theological problem if you disagree with that sentence, because they are made in God’s image, just as you and I are.) How can God then say, “Oh, although I dearly love you, and you please me greatly, you are not allowed to ever love, or be loved by another human”. It conflicts with His nature.

I have alphabetically listed over 40 characteristics of God in columns (and I might have missed a few!), and have highlighted the ones which, to me, seem to be at odds with “Does God create LGBTQ+ folk, and then condemn them for living in accordance with their created orientation and sexuality?”

Awesome	Gracious	Patient
Compassionate	Helper	Rational

Conqueror	Holiness	Respect
Counsellor	Immanent/Fully present and accessible	Righteous
Creator	Immutable/Unchanging	Self-existent
Deliverer	Infinitude	Self-sufficient
Encourager	Justice	Sovereignty
Eternal	Love	Sustainer
Faithfull	Loyal	Tolerant/Slow to anger
Forgiving	Majestic	Transcendent
Generous	Mercy	Trinity
Gentle	Omnipotent	Truth
Goodness	Omnipresent	Wisdom
	Omniscient	Zealous

So that's about thirteen, just over a quarter. If you did the exercise you might come out with a different selection, but my guess would be that the actual number would be significant. Indeed, you could argue for the inclusion of Tolerant, Faithful, and Forgiving, and arguably others. On a different day, I might include them as well, but how can God demonstrate Tolerance, if they simply behave in accordance with his creative direction! I didn't include Forgiving, because I'm now convinced that being LGBTQ+ isn't something needing forgiveness, so it doesn't apply. Even if the issue conflicted with just one aspect of God's character, I would want to find an explanation, and would have to raise serious questions – it shouldn't conflict with ANY – not a single one! The number simply doesn't matter. The fact that it conflicts with so many, should give anyone concern.

I was raised an "Evangelical" Christian, so when I realised my thinking seemed to conflict with the character of God, I also realised I had a problem with my theology, and I needed to sort it out. As an example of using this type of thinking about the character of God, and applying it to an issue, the ethnic cleansing of the Old Testament, "instigated and commanded by God", seems to conflict with parts of God's character, and I have had a problem with that as well in the past. So it is, with anything that contradicts any of God's traits/character, I would want to either research it myself, or get someone to tell me how we can reconcile something that flies in the face of what we know of God.

I am a Bible-believing Christian who relies on God's Word. It is a huge part of my life, so I'm reading (or trying to read) it through what I understand of God's nature. I therefore have a real problem with Nehemiah's bullying of the remnant – striking them and pulling out their hair in his anger, breaking up marriages, etc., as that doesn't reflect the God I know. So, when I read that one class of people have

seemingly been created just to stoke the fires of Hell (however that is realised), I have a real problem because it seems to conflict with so much of what I understand of God's character. They have no hope of change, and no hope of forgiveness (unless they jump through hoops even the strongest straight Christian can't cope with!).

Hence, when I read the Bible, I therefore need to look at what it says and ask these questions:

- As what I read apparently conflicts with God's nature and character, have we understood or translated the Bible correctly in these areas?
- Secondly, what images were in the original authors mind when he wrote the words he used; what was he trying to convey to the people he knew he was writing to?
- Finally, Jesus is by very essence God's Word, so how does the life and teaching of Jesus (especially in the Beatitudes) influence my understanding of the Scripture I have just read?

Since 2015, part of the impetus for this work has been Micah 6: 8, which says:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

It has therefore become, for me, a matter of understanding and seeing God's Justice and Mercy become a reality for a relatively small but significant group of people, particularly in the light of the vitriolic invective targeted by those who claim to be Christians, on various websites. Sadly, we are also seeing a growing number of churches who feel they must harden their positions to protect God's Kingdom, as if God needed our protection! Essentially, they are really responding to fear, which is never a good catalyst for change.

There will probably always be more that I can add to this document – for example things that come up in conversation, or on radio or television – such as "Raca" just now. Suddenly, you see there is a different angle to explore, a Bible passage you see in a new light, or an unforeseen application to the subject we're looking at. At the outset, the subject seems vast and this document has been restructured several times in its lifetime as different issues come to the fore. For several years I have been reluctant to publish this essay for the following reasons:

- The document started as an essay, and I dreaded of how much would have to be re-written (as it turned out, all of it!). An essay is one thing – breaking it down into chapters when the breaks won't happen neatly, wasn't something I relished, although I have now succeeded, after a fashion!
- Lots of material has been culled from websites, initially for my personal use to help me process the arguments, and at this stage I'm not sure whether I've infringed any copyright, so I've given every credit I can find to where it is due, and dropped some very useful material where they wanted payment. This is an educational document exploring the issues and trying to make

sense of Scripture. Assuming I publish this, it will be downloadable for free, so I have only incurred costs, with not a penny to offset costs and the hours spent writing the essay..

- I'm not sure who I'm writing for – principally me, but maybe a handful of others may also read it. I'll try not to reduce the waffle, but that is a skill I have truly mastered, and this project has grown far beyond, even my anticipation! What is waffle and what is important? I'm afraid someone else will have to make that call.
- Cowardice! And there we have it! Life for me would become very difficult in most churches, because so many people in the church profoundly disagree with the stance I now have. I guess I would now be considered as "Raca" by many Christian brothers and sisters. There is also a personal reticence that is largely due to the appalling behaviour of some self-righteous folks, who seem to enjoy berating and insulting others, especially on the internet, where they hide behind their anonymity, spraying their hatred of anyone they disagree with. Collectively they are known as Trolls. Sadly, they do it in the Name of Jesus, little understanding that they themselves have such a shallow grasp of His teaching, and a truly Pharisaical grip on the Law. I'll give one or two examples later in the essay. I don't want to find myself in their crosshairs. I have a choice. However, there are many who through no fault of their own, find themselves in the firing line, so I must stand with them and be courageous.

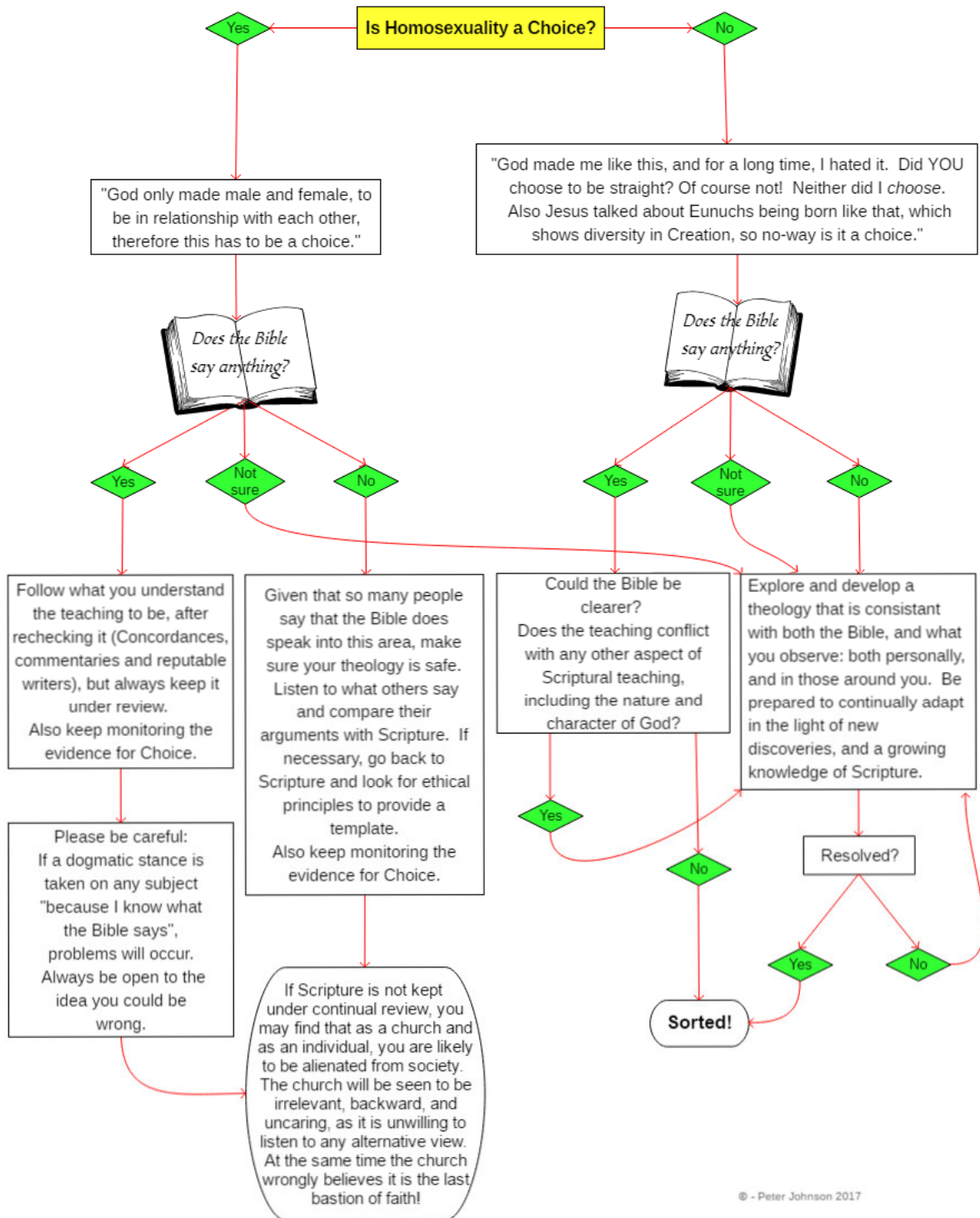
The issues about how you reconcile being LGBTQ, with being a Christian, are issues that place people with far greater intellect than my own, at polar opposite ends of the spectrum, so this is my attempt to make sense of a Biblically confusing situation. Many folks will disagree with my conclusions, others will agree. Does that make one camp saved and the other doomed to 'the fires of hell'? Of course not! My salvation, and yours, depends only on your relationship with Jesus the Saviour, and live in the light of that decision. I know where I stand, and I trust you know where you stand. I remind you of that C.S. Lewis quote on the first page.

When I started this project, I had begun to change from my traditional conservative background inherited over more than 55yrs of life within a committed church environment, to: "I'm convinced, although I recognise that there are weak areas, but I feel totally at ease in embracing and welcoming LGBTQ+ folks into church life on the same terms as anyone else." There were some big leaps, and some slower changes in that period of about two years. Just to clarify: that acceptance as having a role to play (some might say, "ministry") within part of the church family, such as home group leader, serving communion, helping to lead worship, etc.) is the same as anyone else - based on a proclamation of faith - and seeking to grow closer to the Lord each day. I come from a Baptist tradition in the UK, where church attendance shouldn't be an issue for anyone (though sometimes even that is problematic) but church membership is granted to those who want to join, who have demonstrated their faith commitment by Baptism, and being vetted by responsible members or leaders to gauge that their faith is real and Bible-based.

They can then be part of the decision-making body of the church. I say that in case you are Anglican or any other faith-group, that have different practices. I can no longer accept the traditional anti-gay stance of the church, as I find it flies in the face of much of God's teaching in Scripture, as I understand it. As I progressed through my essay, I found my views began to solidify, and although I wondered if cracks might develop, this hasn't happened. Certainly, as time went on, I found it exciting that I no longer felt chained to my previous beliefs, and that it was perfectly acceptable before God to take a different view – and retain a completely Scriptural position. It is exciting and liberating. And like Douglas Adams wrote in 'The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul': "I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be." (Ch. 13, p. 159)

On the next page, I have included a flow-chart, which I put together in 2017, but the thought processes underlying the chart, have been there from the beginning. My thought processes were nagging away, behind my feelings of discomfort with my traditional thinking, but they only became a formalised and logical structure with the construction of this graphic, two and a half years after the essay was started. You might want to create a different graphic – fine – do so. The idea of Choice seems to me to be the "elephant in the room". If people had to 'choose' to be gay or lesbian, the argument seemed a lot more persuasive that the church could argue it wasn't acceptable, perhaps on moral grounds. However, if 'choice' was not an option, it seems wholly unjust to get someone to cosmetically behave as if straight, while internally their emotions were at war. You are asking a person to lie (pretending to be something they are not. Check out the origins of the word Hypocrite) – never a good Christian position! As an illustration how just how bad this can get, please read Vicky Beeching's book "Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free From Shame", or Rev Dr Mel White's book "Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay And Christian in America" written more than 20yrs earlier, but describing very similar torments. Right at the beginning I will say that 'choice' doesn't exist and science is now proving homosexuality is biological, developing in the womb due to epigenetic changes, as we will see later.

I'll talk about stories and I'll refer you to websites and videos and audio files – some of which may make you weep. The fact that we can talk about there being Christians in the LGBTQ+ community is a real testimony to God's Grace, and the faithfulness of this community. No credit can be directed at the national church (of any denomination), but there are a few fellowships and national bodies of denominations who, rather belatedly, now extend their arms to embrace the community, in the Grace of God – but far too few.



Note: In the Author's personal view, having heard and read many individual stories, all the medical, empirical and logical evidence, categorically points at there being 'No Choice'. No other conclusion is possible, or indeed acceptable.

Note: You can't take a position of agreeing a person has no choice, and at the same time condemning them - you make God appear capricious, simply creating a person to damn them.

Neither can you take a position of agreeing a person has no choice, and requiring them to be celibate. Jesus saw *celibacy* as a choice, never an obligation.

Much of the essay is quoting and exploring Scripture, which is as it should be. However, the use of Scripture depends on how you think it should be applied. I have used Scripture as would be normal for anyone from a Conservative

Evangelical background – that is, seeing the whole of the Bible as God/Holy Spirit-led, so that every verse effectively has an equal weight. This is my background.

However, so that what follows makes sense, my stance has changed in that although I still take the Bible very seriously, I can no longer take it literally. I believe this to be an entirely logical and rational position which I will explain later, and the line of a good many other Christians, including theologians also take. This is not watered-down faith, or faith tainted by the “spirit of the age”, this is a real and deepening faith. To say otherwise is deeply offensive, and you can only make that kind of judgement if you know me personally.

If you put me in a box labelled ‘Heretic’, you can dismiss everything I say, and leave your own thinking untouched and unaffected, and that is not the Jesus way, because He requires us to grow and develop, to come off milk and eat solid food. So, if you disagree – even if you think I’m heretical, be sure you know exactly which passages I’ve interpreted wrong, what other Scriptures illustrate my error, and which ethics I’ve applied incorrectly, otherwise the basis for rejection can be put down to simple prejudice.

In writing this, I have needed to spend a lot of time reading the Bible, and I would ask everyone to make a point of following a Bible-reading plan that helps you read the whole library of individual books that make up the Bible, inside a year. You won’t necessarily follow the path I’ve been on, but you will deepen your knowledge. A close friend, when reading an early draft of this work, thought that it wouldn’t be long before I lost my faith. This was because of all the problems and questions I was finding with the Bible, but quite the opposite has happened. Questioning is healthy, but it’s how you deal with that questioning, that determines the results. One of my Old Testament heroes is Job, who loved questions, but in the end, had no answers, but simply a deep experience of God, and this took away his need to have everything neatly answered, and this would be my prayer for myself and others.

In my experience, most Christians (including Evangelicals) have **never** completely read their Bibles. They know parts of the Bible fairly well, though only superficially. I wonder if you know how much I want to see that statement proved wrong! For me, the idea of reading from Genesis to Revelation wasn’t much fun but when I found a plan that enabled me to read the books chronologically, it was much more helpful, because I wasn’t trying to jump back and forward through history and getting confused with the order of things. Instead I’d read all the bits about Saul, David, etc; in parallel. It’s when you do this you see how different the facts of some of the stories are. If you read them in book order, there may be a month or more between two identical stories, so you miss the nuances.

Even without a proper plan, and I really do recommend a structured plan, there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible, so if you aim to read it in a year, it works out at 3.25 chapters a day. If you read four chapters some days and three on others, it’ll take you close to a year. For the completists out in reader-land, there are 31,102 verses, which is an average of a little more than 26 verses per chapter, so if you read more

than 85 verses a day, you'll cover it in a year, but don't be guided by numbers, but by context and content, mixed with some God-given common-sense!

Right from the start, I need to say that one of the problems we have, is the way we interpret Scripture. One of the key ways we read Scripture is to ask what the passage was saying to its original recipients – not just the words, but what was the underlying message they understood. What did they understand the writer to be saying? If you can't be certain what Ezra's audience (for example) understood from his words, you can't make a dogmatic theology that applies to people outside his target audience. We read the Old Testament Law and think we understand it clearly. However, there is a fascinating verse in Nehemiah that illustrates this brilliantly. It is chapter 8: 5-8:

⁵ Ezra opened the book. ...⁷ The Levites ... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

Why didn't they understand it? Ezra's audience were much closer to the date it was written! What the Levites were doing wasn't just translating the book of the Law but explaining what the Law expected and required. It seems likely that the remnant left behind at the exile, adopted the languages of the tribes around them and many had, after seventy years, little or no understanding of Hebrew. So, although Hebrew should have been their native language, they needed it translated and explained in a way they understood. We too should welcome those who make the Bible make sense to us, because very few of us read the Bible in its original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek to confirm what we understand. If, as is the case for most of us, we have no language skills, we must read around a broad range of those scholars who can. We need to go back to those languages and see what they were really saying.

How did Jesus use Scripture? Pretty much as he wanted, is the simple answer, providing it pointed to His final goal. As Steve Chalke pointed out in one of his ChalkeTalks (<https://www.openchurch.network/content/chalke-talk-41-the-spirit-or-the-letter-of-the-law>), Jesus supposedly quotes from Isaiah, and it reads like a single passage, but in fact Jesus quotes mainly from Isaiah 61, but then pulls in a couple of phrases from totally different chapters! Let's look at it, starting at Luke 4

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,*

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The actual passage from Isaiah 61 reads:

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,

Compare the two. Bear in mind Jesus knew his Bible very well indeed and would have been able to quote the passage word-perfectly without the scroll being handed to Him. Yet He adjusts the phrasing to convey a particular message in line with the theme of His ministry. If I am asked about an issue I would probably say: "the Bible says something along the lines of..." or, I might ask them to give me a moment while I look it up. Jesus knew his Bible. People called him "Rabbi". So, his use of Scripture is interesting. Jesus' phrase "to set the oppressed free," comes from Isaiah 58: 6, and His use of "and recovery of sight for the blind" may come from Isaiah 35: 5 or Isaiah 29: 18.

While we are at it also compare Hebrews 8: 6-13 with the original text of Jeremiah 31: 31-34. It's not as radical, but interesting to see the differences, and to perhaps ask why they misquote their sources. Again, this is a problem for the literalists because which text is right if they claim to be from the same source?

Let me give an example of an Apostle reading back into an Old Testament passage what the original writer could not possibly have intended, and this is from Hosea. I came across an example in a book by Peter Enns, who is an American biblical scholar, theologian, and writer. He is the Abram S. Clemens professor of biblical studies at Eastern University (St. Davids, Pennsylvania) and has written several books. In his book called "*Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*", he cites several examples, of which I'm only quoting one here. In this instance I'm using his example, and my narrative. In Hosea 11: 1 – 2, we read:

¹When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
² But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

Hosea clearly had no concept that he was making any sort of prophesy, he is looking at the people of Israel and picturing them as God sees *them*: as his child. He illustrates how he brought them out of Egypt, told them how to behave, gave

them a new land to live in, but they went astray, and continued going astray. Much later, the Apostle Matthew writes to his Jewish audience, reviewing that verse from Hosea, and reads back into it a prophesy about Jesus coming from Egypt. In Matthew 2: 15, he writes:

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

We are not Apostles, so, we should be a bit careful how we use Scripture. But we also be aware that Biblical interpretation is a very complex business. Not only do we have the scriptures themselves, but we have many old and ancient texts written closer to the original date to interpret the passages for the people contemporaneous to these additional texts.

*While I was in graduate school, one of my professors (a traditional Jewish scholar) said something that has stuck with me. This may sound terribly self-absorbed, but it was one of those "aha" moments that generated a process of rethinking a few things: "For Jews, the Bible is a problem to be solved. For Christians, it is a message to be proclaimed." This professor was referring to the history of Jewish biblical interpretation. It began centuries before Christ, and we see evidence of Jewish interpretive activity in such collections of writings as the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls. In fact, within the Old Testament itself we see later authors interpreting earlier ones, a phenomenon usually referred to as "innerbiblical interpretation." Those familiar with this history know that much Jewish interpretation is concerned to address problems of biblical interpretation. These problems arise, for example, because of the inherent ambiguities in the Hebrew language--something every Hebrew student is well aware of. (Knowing the original Hebrew does not always make the text "come alive"! It often introduces obscurities that English readers are not aware of.) Other difficulties arise from points of tension that exist between parts of the Old Testament itself. A look at the major Jewish texts that engage in biblical interpretation (Mishnah, Talmud, midrashic literature) reveals an approach to biblical interpretation that, among other things, expends tremendous energy in engaging these tensions and ambiguities. In fact, these ancient interpreters seem to revel in the chance to do so; the Bible itself, precisely because of its inherent ambiguities and tensions, is believed to **invite** problem solving. And if one were to look closely at some of these Jewish interpretive texts, one would see that these biblical tensions and ambiguities are solved in multiple--even contradictory--ways, and these solutions are allowed to remain side by side in these authoritative canons of Jewish tradition. The stress seems to be **not** on solving the problems once and for all*

but on a community upholding a **conversation** with Scripture with creative energy.

Peter Enns. Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (p. 62). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

On page 142 of the same book, we read:

[One] way of putting the problem is that apostolic hermeneutics violates what is considered to be a fundamental interpretive principle: don't take things out of context. So, it is thought, we cannot have New Testament writers taking the Old Testament out of context. But we must learn to look at it differently. It is not that the Old Testament words are taken out of context and tossed into the air to fall where they may. Rather, the New Testament authors take the Old Testament out of one context, that of the original historical moment of Israel's past, and place it into another context, the one that represents the final goal to which Israel's story has been moving.

(Just now we read about Mishnah, Talmud and midrashic literature. These are early scrolls written by Rabbi's as companion texts to clarify or expound the Hebrew Bible. These are useful tools used by Bible scholars to interpret passages of Scripture. They are not Scripture themselves but are nonetheless vital to understanding and interpreting it.)

I hope you feel your thinking already being challenged! Is it exciting, boring or nerve-racking? If you lost the plot over the last page or two, stick with me, because it gets much easier. By making the arguments I do, I will have failed if anyone loses confidence in the Scriptures. The Bible is a challenging but liberating book, and we never cease to learn if we keep an open heart and mind. We will see that, as a whole, the Bible superficially, isn't very consistent, especially as a detailed historical narrative, and this presents a few problems.

I seem to be part of a growing number of Christians, who, whilst believing the Bible is God's word for us, and vital to us, don't believe that it is a reliable, accurate, **chronological** history. Instead, it is seen as a series of portraits of God, His character, and his actions, seen by and written by many different authors, each from their own standpoint, and therefore these writings won't necessarily agree with each other (Kings and Chronicles don't always agree with each other, even when reporting the 'facts' of the same story – check it for yourself.). It is argued that much of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is not 'dictated by God', but authors describing the story of God's relationship with the people of Israel from different perspectives. God chooses to work with us, not intervene directly, hence the writers of scripture wrote out of their experiences under the inspiration of God, but nevertheless their humanness shows through.

If God dictated every book, they would all have an identical style, and there would be no mistakes - but the writers were clearly human. If you question how God could inspire someone and yet allow mistakes to happen, consider how you if you

are a believer, have been given the Holy Spirit as a seal (not available to the Old Testament writers) and yet there are times when you get it right, and others when you get it so, so wrong. If you come from a charismatic part of the church, you will know that when the Spirit falls on you, you don't lose control and become an automaton, you can stop praying/praising or whatever you are doing, whenever you need to.

The Bible is still wholly vital and precious, and it isn't devalued – it's just a different view of how to read it, and so from this perspective, there will be no problem ignoring the troublesome Mosaic Law areas of the argument. Don't forget that the authors and their audience lived in a very different time and culture to our own, when values and understanding was totally different. How many of you understand the Book of Revelation, and yet it made sense to his immediate readers? If you or I wrote about our experience of God in the context of our daily lives and were able to teleport it back to Noah, how much would he understand and relate to?

I am therefore writing from the perspective of an initial 55+ years of taking a literal view of the Bible, in order to explain why my attitudes have now changed, whilst, as I said earlier, deepening my understanding of God, but having in mind that some readers will also still read the Bible literally.

Steve Chalke is seen by some as an apostate for some of his views, but he is a servant of God getting his hands dirty, bringing the poor, the alien, and the outcasts into God's Kingdom. I occasionally have an intake of breath when he says something, but when I go away and ponder, I usually come back realising the point he made was spot on, although sometimes I might not wholly understand or agree! For instance, I cannot yet accept Christian Universalism, which Steve now seems to argue in favour of, but that is for another day! But may God continue to use and bless him. Anyway, he made a helpful comment about the Bible in his video series "Chalke Talk - 95 burning questions for the 21st Century Church" Week 8 – "If it doesn't look like Jesus it's not God":

"The books of the Bible contain the account of the ancient sacred dialogue, or conversation, which is initiated, inspired and guided by God, with, and among, humanity; a conversation that charts humanity's growing understanding of God's character, only fully revealed, in the end, through Jesus."

<https://www.openchurch.network/content/chalke-talk-8-if-it-doesnt-look-like-jesus-its-not-god>.

Here are some issues: The Genesis creation story talks about light and darkness being created on the first day, but the Sun and Moon weren't created till the fourth day. We only understand what light and darkness are, because of the Sun and Moon. So that's a problem. And if we are talking about the **concept** of light and darkness being created, there weren't any people around to notice the concept anyway! And if God has been around for eternity past, he would already know what light and darkness were, wouldn't he? How could He create light and darkness if He Himself didn't know the difference? Furthermore, there are two

Creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, and they differ: in Genesis 1 plants and vegetation are made on the third day, and mankind isn't created till the sixth day. Then in Chapter 2 we are told that God created Adam **before** the vegetation was created and then put him in a garden. That's no problem if you read the story as one that is simply illustrating that God is the author and Creator of all, as confirmed in Colossians 1:

¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

However, if you hold that the Bible is literally a chronological account of History, you have big problems. I would therefore like to move us away from a literalistic reading of Scripture yet still honouring it as teaching from our Holy God.

Now compare the stories of the demon-possessed man told in Mark 5: 1-17 and Luke 8: 26-37 with Matthew 8: 28-34. Mark and Luke talk about one man, but Matthew says there were two. Clearly everyone is writing about the same incident, because it happens in the same place with the same story arc, so you can't say there were two separate occasions – that would stretch credibility. Both stories in their own way are saying "Look, this is what the power and authority of Jesus can do". They are not reporting a crime to the courts, where they want to understand exactly who did what. There are many, many examples throughout Scripture where a story is repeated, and the details differ, you simply must invest the time and explore with an open mind. Why should it threaten the authority of Scripture if details differ? It doesn't, unless you hold a very rigid view of the innate historical forensic accuracy of every word. If this seems uncomfortable talk quietly to Jesus about it.

I hope you agree with me, but if you don't, please keep a receptive spirit, and a questioning mind. This project is an attempt to draw together all the arguments to see if my current position is credible or needs review in the light of Scripture. Having reached my present position, I know that I can say that I am happy to stand before God and say that the views I now hold are my best attempt at reconciling Scripture with what I understand to be God's character and teaching.

The relationship of the LGBTQ+ community and the church

Turning now to our main issue, that of the relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and the church, from this point on, I will use the expression 'non-affirming' as an alternative to 'traditional' or 'conservative', and the word 'affirming' to refer to those who accept or affirm those who are LGBTQ+. The reason for this being, that the terms 'traditional', or 'conservative', cover areas far broader than simply the LGBTQ+ issues, and in this essay, I am only dealing with this one issue. However, there may be places where the use of 'traditional' or 'conservative' is completely correct, at least in my own mind, so as I'm writing primarily for myself, be warned!

I used the term 'non-affirming' just now and it is sometimes difficult to understand who I might be referring to, but in the latter part of August 2017 a group of 150 conservative (using the broader meaning of this term) evangelicals from across the United States signed a statement that outlined their beliefs on human sexuality, including opposition to same-sex marriage and gender-fluid identity. The document has been called the Nashville Statement because the gathering of scholars, pastors, and other leaders (including the Southern Baptist Convention), under the guidance of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood finalized a draft of the statement, in Nashville.

Although there is a difference in outlook, and possibly elements of theology between US and UK Christians, many feel that the American Church has an enormous influence on the British church, through its worship music and high-profile speakers. My personal perception is that many of the Christians I have spoken to in UK churches, would probably ally themselves with much of the content of the Nashville Statement, although I would love to be proved wrong.

The Statement is quite long-winded and written in the style of creating 14 Articles, of which each begins by affirming one statement, and denying an opposing statement, and can be read in full here, if you are interested:

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

Of the original 150 signatories, only 15 were women, and maybe that tells its own story of how misogynistic the church in the States has become. (On that same site read the (1987) Danvers Statement to find perhaps the parent document of the Nashville Statement.)

There is a helpful page reviewing the Statement on the Religious Tolerance site: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/nashville-statement-on-homosexuals-and-transgender-persons.htm>

Having pored over the Nashville Statement, I find my thinking is now very much at odds with it and we'll explore the how and why, later. Some of the Articles look reasonable in certain light until you look at what lies hidden between the words, so there is now only one of those Articles I can support, but as a whole, in spite of some well-known signatories, in my view, it sets the church back many years.

As a response to the Nashville Statement, Jim Wallis, the President of the Sojourners (a Christian community founded in 1971, focussing on social justice issues and how Christians can find God's path through them), wrote:

The timing of a new "manifesto" aimed against LGBTQ Christians and their allies — in the immediate aftermath of Charlottesville and in the midst of Americans rescuing each other in Texas — is more than unfortunate. In a time when the evils of racism gain new, frightening currency in our culture, and racial bigotry is being exemplified by the president of the United States with silence from most white evangelicals, some Christian leaders have determined that now is the time to declare that agreement on issues of sexual orientation and

identity is a litmus test for authentic Christian faith — while not doing so for repentance from the sin, myth, and idol of white supremacy. This “Nashville Statement” exemplifies a grave mistake of public discernment and creates a more polarized division that seriously is damaging any credible evangelical witness in today’s culture. And that this is presented as the litmus test for true Christian faith sends a clear message to our Christian brothers and sisters of color.

Many Christians, including evangelicals, have been seeking to repent of the damage done to LGBTQ people by our churches, even if they still wrestle with theological issues around sexuality. In this statement, there is none of that spirit — no repentance or humility for the church’s treatment of LGBTQ Christians. Rather, the spirit of certainty and judgment in the rejecting of LGBTQ persons, exemplified by this statement, is one of the reasons a new generation of believers is leaving the church. In great contrast, Jesus’ radical call to love each other, our neighbors, those different from us, and even our enemies is painfully missing in this statement.

Also missing is any attempt to find common ground, be welcoming faith communities, and find civil and compassionate ways to dialogue and even disagree. Rather, this manifesto’s deliberate purpose seems to be to further divide the church on difficult issues. The few women signers to this statement is also indicative of the clear connection being made between the rejection of LGBTQ Christians and this group’s rejection of equality of women and their leadership in the churches.

Instead we should look for common ground, compassion, civility, and consistency as we pursue and seek to discern the heart of God on these questions.

<https://sojo.net/articles/jim-wallis-nashville-statement-damaging-people-and-evangelical-witness>

On the release of the Nashville Statement, Social Media went mad for a while, but one of the better Tweets I read was this:

*RevDaniel @RevDaniel Aug 30
Dear Nashville pastors,
The Father created me gay
The Son called me his own.
The Spirit anointed me for ministry.
Take it up with them. xo*

About twenty-four hours after the Nashville Statement was released, a further ‘statement’ was released, this time, in my opinion, much more in the Spirit of Jesus, from drafted by Rev. Brandon Robertson as part of Christians United (In Support of LGBT+ Inclusion in the Church), which deliberately followed a similar template and style to the earlier statement, and used to be available at

<http://www.christiansunitedstatement.org/>, but the website seems to be unavailable now that the fuss has died down. However, I do have my own saved PDF copy of the original webpage which you can download [here](#), and I came across a blog quoting from the main part of the Statement here:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2017/08/30/christians-united-statement-support-lgbt-inclusion/>

I made a comment earlier about the noticeably few women signing the Nashville Statement: you can see for yourself, from my copy of the original web pages, how many female Church Leaders signed the alternative Christians United Statement.

So, we therefore have two opposing statements, both from Bible Believing Christians, and both are at polar opposites to each other, so we must try and work out where we as individuals stand. As for myself, my position has changed markedly. Even with my previous views, I could never have ever enthusiastically banged the drum for the Nashville Statement, though I might have paid a hesitant lip-service to parts of it until late 2014, but now I'm far more comfortable sitting down with Jesus and enthusiastically saying I can put my name under the Christians United Statement.

I don't expect those who have signed up to the Nashville Statement to be reading this, but there may be those who are already uncomfortable about the church's stance (as I had been), and who might be seeing if I have anything sensible to contribute to the debate.

So, through the rest of this document I will use the terms 'affirming' and 'non-affirming' as group identifiers for those who support the LGBTQ+ community and those who don't.

– Chapter 2 –

Scripture and/or Science.

Throughout this document, all Scriptural quotes are from the NIV (2011 version) unless indicated otherwise. By way of background, the NIV that was published from 2011 onwards assimilated many, but not all, of the changes made when the TNIV was published in 2005. I understand that the TNIV, published in 2005, and produced by the same translation committee as the NIV, was essentially the third edition of the NIV, after the 1978 and 1984 editions.¹ However, as many Christians still use pre-2011 published NIV Bibles, I want to make sure that if your version of the NIV differs to that in this document, you understand why. At the time of writing (2015-2020) that is the current version.

I am not a trained theologian, so ultimately, **my** understanding of Scripture, obviously influenced by many writers across hundreds of years, along with my life experience, will determine **my** position, not cultural norms. My position is my position, it isn't necessarily yours. Although I have read extensively around the issue (as you can see from the sources I've used), I do not have all knowledge, so my experiences, my culture, my social interactions and my education will all impact on how I interpret Scripture. I will have read a different range of books to you, and possibly reacted to them in a different way to you. When I read a passage of Scripture, I measure it against all the other teachings contained within the library of books making up the Bible to help me understand its message; I read commentaries and other helpful insights from those more knowledgeable than me, and come to a conclusion. I do not have a monopoly on understanding Scripture, so I give it my best effort and rely on the Holy Spirit to prompt doubts or affirmation. There is clearly some subjectivity, but that is the same for everybody, even the heads of every Christian tradition cannot claim a 100% accuracy rate for correctly understanding what they read. So, yes, of course you can say I've got some things wrong, but fundamentally, I believe I'm walking the path God wants me to follow.

Peter Enns is a theologian who I will quote several times in my writings. He writes:

The Bible is an ancient book and we shouldn't be surprised to see it act like one. So seeing God portrayed as a violent, tribal warrior is not how God is but how he was understood to be by the ancient Israelites communing with God in their time and place.

The biblical writers were storytellers. Writing about the past was never simply about understanding the past for its own sake, but about shaping, molding, and creating the past to speak to the present. "Getting the past right" wasn't the driving issue. "Who are we now?" was.

¹ Christopher R Smith in The Books of the Bible from Biblica, Translating the Bible.

<https://goodquestionblog.com/2015/01/28/why-isnt-the-tniv-available-on-biblegateway/>

The Bible presents a variety of points of view about God and what it means to walk in his ways. This stands to reason, since the biblical writers lived at different times, in different places, and wrote for different reasons. In reading the Bible we are watching the spiritual journeys of people long ago.

Jesus, like other Jews of the first century, read his Bible creatively, seeking deeper meaning that transcended or simply bypassed the boundaries of the words of scripture. Where Jesus ran afoul of the official interpreters of the Bible of his day was not in his creative handling of the Bible, but in drawing attention to his own authority and status in doing so.

A crucified and resurrected messiah was a surprise ending to Israel's story. To spread the word of this messiah, the earliest Christian writers both respected Israel's story while also going beyond that story. They transformed it from a story of Israel centered on Torah to a story of humanity centered on Jesus.

This is the Bible we have, the Bible where God meets us.

Not a book kept at a safe distance from the human drama. Not a fragile Bible that has to be handled with care lest it crumble in our hands. Not a book that has to be defended 24/7 to make sure our faith doesn't dissolve.

In other words, not an artificially well-behaved Bible that gives false comfort, but the Holy Bible, the Word of God, with wrinkles, complexities, unexpected maneuvers, and downright strangeness.

This is the Bible God has given his people. This Bible is worth reading and paying attention to, because this is the Bible God uses, as he always has, to point its readers to a deeper trust in him.

We are free to walk away from this invitation, of course, but we are not free to make a Bible in our own image. What the Bible looks like is God's call, not ours.

Peter Enns. "The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It" (p. 231-2). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

At the end of 2018 I came across another wonderfully helpful website set up by Rev'd Dr Jonathan Tallon, who describes himself as a New Testament lecturer and early Church researcher. There is a brilliant set of videos, that are very helpful and worth watching: <http://www.bibleandhomosexuality.org/>

As part of the process of learning, I must listen to the LGBTQ+ community and their experiences, and measure whether what they say against what I understand Scripture to be saying. At the same time, I must try to understand how God's

grace applies to the situation I'm looking at. That may sound impossible to many, but I believe it isn't.

Regarding Scripture, the church has a long and sad history of clinging to the exact words of translated scripture, although another reality was staring it in the face:

- For many years, the church insisted the world was flat and we persecuted, tortured, and killed those who said it was 'round'.
- Then we insisted for many years more that the Earth was the centre of the universe, and everything circled around us, continuing to persecute anyone who disagreed with us. Galileo was found "vehemently suspect of heresy" by the Inquisition and spent his last nine years under house arrest, because he saw the Sun as the centre of the Universe instead of the Earth. During his trial, he was threatened with torture if he did not tell the 'truth'. We might chuckle that people thought that the Earth was the centre of everything, but people died because the church adhered absolutely to what it believed Scripture said. The church saw change as a threat to God that they had to resist at all costs.

Let me also include a caveat: Galileo lived at the same time as Kepler. They both held similar views about the Solar System, though not always. Kepler ran into no charges of heresy for his views, whereas Galileo got into a lot of trouble. One writer (Dr Allan Chapman: "Comets, Cosmology and the Big Bang: From Halley to Hubble") suggests that one of the reasons Galileo had so many problems was the way he treated people, whereas Kepler kept his head down, and was more circumspect in how he presented his findings. Nevertheless, however objectionable he may have been, there is no reason for the Church to make accusations of heresy, and threats of torture.

- Many Christians still insist the world was made in seven literal days, and these folks will still make life difficult for those who hold a looser view to the age of the Earth, thinking they have compromised their faith. No Christian doubts God *could* have made the Earth in 7 literal days, but why would He have made it so that it looks so much older – 4-4.5 billion years instead of the proposed 6-10k years. Look at any cave system with stalagmites and stalactites. I was lucky to visit the Gruta Rei do Mato caves (see picture) not far from Belo Horizonte, in Brazil where some of the columns were 20m tall. Columns are what is formed when stalagmites and stalactites meet. We know they grow at around 10cm every thousand years, so if you do the maths, you'll realise they started to form around a million years



ago (10cm per 1k years for stalagmites and 10cm per 1k years for stalactites, so a closing growth of 20cm per 1k years). This is assuming the columns finished growing yesterday, and not thousands of years ago. The limestone rock from which the columns grew would have been formed 'a long time' before that!

We believe God could create a large tree, instantly. If we immediately cut it down, the rings would give the impression it had been grown years before, but what would be the point? A God who lies and is deceitful, or putting the best gloss on it, one that is misleading? That's dodgy theology! That would fly in the face of the doctrine that God cannot lie. Not only that, but at this moment, the furthest known galaxy to have been spotted from the Earth is so far away that its light took 13.1 billion years to reach Earth – which means the light was emitted just 700 million years after the Big Bang – assuming that was the beginning. Christians generally assume the Earth was created in the same general timeframe as the rest of the universe, so if the universe is very old, and the Earth very young, we have an issue. Using the tree analogy, if God spontaneously created the Earth ten thousand years ago, why make it appear much older. What is the point? Why not just let it play out naturally? Why not make it look like a new creation – it would make it easier to believe in a God of Creation? My point is that Creation is not a simplistic story and may include some elements of evolution in its history!

- I came across an article asking "If evolution is true, then why didn't God simply tell us that? Given that Christ is the Creator who is the Truth, and since as God he cannot lie (Numbers 23:19) and His word is truth (John 17:17), why would this same Christ take millions of years to evolve the world, then tell us he created it all in six days? (Exodus 20:11)" [\[https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/10-questions-to-ask-Christians-who-believe-in-evolution\]](https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/10-questions-to-ask-Christians-who-believe-in-evolution) To me it's a daft question. One example: On a simple level why didn't God make it clear that the Sun was the centre of the Solar System – that would have saved a lot of people from persecution! Why didn't God make it clear the Earth is a sphere, and maybe that there were other planets? Couldn't Jesus have explained that the Earth was minute compared to the Sun, and that the Moon was small compared to the Earth? They simply thought of the Sun and Moon as greater and lesser lights (Genesis 1) – not size but brightness. The church could have then been at the forefront of scientific understanding. There is nothing written about stars – other than that they are around and seem to have been placed in patterns/constellations (Job 9:9; 38:31; and a few others). I would also add that the scientific reasoning and widespread travel needed to advance the theory of Evolution wouldn't be available for another 1800 years, so there wouldn't have been much point in Jesus sitting His disciples down for a quiet chat round a fire and explaining the idea of evolution. They simply wouldn't have had a clue what He was talking about. How could He demonstrate it to them? It simply wasn't important for them at that time.

- Another issue is that the church has traditionally stood behind the idea that life was only created on Earth. (If there were life on other planets, would Jesus have to go to those planets and die there too? If there are many planets with life on them, does Jesus just spend His time dropping in on those planets to die there as well?!) In late September 2015 NASA scientists got really excited because they found evidence that water still flows on the Martian surface. Today there are many articles about the existence of water on Mars: <https://www.nature.com/search?q=water+on+mars>. Most scientists say that where liquid water is found, so is life - but whether that is true in this case, is still to be determined. So, we can say that it is well within the bounds of possibility to expect scientists to confirm microbes existed at some point on Mars, and if not Mars, perhaps one or two of the moons orbiting other planets, so what impact will that have on Theology. It certainly wouldn't threaten the fact that Earth, and indeed mankind, is a special creation of God, but our theology is bound to have to be modified again soon if we insist that life can only exist on Earth. Maybe an argument can be made that life transferred from Earth to Mars soon after it began on Earth – or vice versa, perhaps through a collision with a huge meteorite. Alternatively, perhaps life simply developed – how would that alter our theology?

When I was young the Creation/Evolution debate was hot – especially in America – less so here in the UK, though it was still a major issue and I was part of it! Creationists would argue a “young Earth” theology, and shout down anyone considering evolution. Any scientists with a faith, arguing scientifically in the public eye, for a “young Earth” are now regarded as a little strange. Adherents still exist, but they are becoming rarer. The debate seems to have moved on to “Theistic Evolution” as against and sometimes alongside “old Earth Creationism.” Theology must move on as we learn more about science. Science and Scripture are not enemies, but instead should, and must, work hand in hand. It is very wrong if Christians dismiss science. Science can correctly ask whether we have read the text right, such as when we thought the sun went around the Earth. We like to embrace it when it proves something we like and treat it with suspicion and disbelief if it is something that threatens something we like to believe. Instead, we should check the science has been conducted properly, and then review our theology in case we have made a mistake with what we believe. If the church had done that with Galileo, many people would have been spared – isn't that a Gospel principle?

- Then we have the role of women in church life – can they be leaders or are they simply there to do the sewing and make cups of tea?! Whilst this battle has largely been resolved in favour of full contribution, there are still parts of the church that exclude women from having a full role in church life – such as the signatories to the Nashville Statement. My point is that views and interpretations of scripture can change over time. Not just that, but it is healthy, providing the Bible remains central to the new position.

- And what about slavery – thoroughly endorsed by Scripture, but universally regarded by contemporary Christians, and most modern societies and cultures, as repugnant. How many people have died because of slavery? Again, we'll come back to this in a moment.

The issue of how we interpret Scripture is tackled by Peter Enns. At the start of his book, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* he writes:

On the one hand, I am very eager to affirm that many evangelical instincts are correct and should be maintained, for example, the conviction that the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is God's gift to the church. Any theories concerning Scripture that do not arise from these fundamental instincts are unacceptable.

On the other hand, how the evangelical church fleshes out its doctrine of Scripture will always have somewhat of a provisional quality to it. This is not to say that each generation must disregard the past and start afresh, formulating ever-new doctrines, bowing to all the latest fads. But it is to say that at such time when new evidence comes to light, or old evidence is seen in a new light, we must be willing to engage that evidence and adjust our doctrine accordingly. ...

[T]he scientific evidence showed us that the worldview of the biblical authors affected what they thought and wrote, and so the worldviews of the biblical authors must be taken into consideration in matters of biblical interpretation and formulating a doctrine of Scripture.

Enns, Peter. Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (p. 1-2). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Later in that same book he makes the helpful observation that: *"Biblical interpretation is a path we walk rather than a fortress we defend."* And that should be our attitude, curious, open and measuring everything against Scripture.

For these reasons making an argument about sexuality based solely on Scripture seems unwise at best, especially if science has already gone a long way towards questioning and repudiating the traditional so-called church understanding, so I will examine in a certain amount of detail what we are facing, then I'll look at Scripture and try to make some sense of it, seeing whether what Scripture is describing is what we are looking at, and then reach a conclusion, which then must inform my thinking and actions. Before some folk jump up and down about the beginning of this paragraph, let me make the point that Scripture is authoritative about Theological issues as well as the areas of social justice, morality and ethics. However, it can't be authoritative in areas like mathematics and science, where things are either true or false, though certainly there are times it can and must contribute to the debate.

So, what is the place of Scripture in this piece? I would say it is central and we will be taking a detailed look at it, but Scripture in certain circumstances has nothing to

say. When talking about the specific orientations and what is happening at the cellular level in the body, you can't get anything useful from Scripture. Neither can Scripture give direct examples of what life is like for an LGBTQ+ oriented person. Even the [non-]issue of whether being gay is a choice, or an orientation, is not addressed in Scripture. None of the key passages deal with this – not even Romans 1. As a result, I have used:

- the Bible to explore moral, ethical and spiritual issues and provide guidance,
- the testimony of the LGBTQ+ community to understand their experiences (and feelings of rejection),
- scientists to understand the biology and psychology,
- historians to see how far back these issues go,
- and finally, media reports and commentaries because often they will explain things clearly, where maybe a scientific paper isn't very readable to those like me, whose education is not at the same level!

However, Scripture is very useful when we look at the ethics and morality of any situation, and indeed this essay is only as long as it is because the Bible is so important to me, so this is not a capitulation to the ethics of our contemporary society. It seems the problem we face is because many see homosexuality as a moral issue, so we try and use the Bible. We don't recognise that it is not a moral issue, but a scientific issue, where the Bible isn't authoritative.

In case you misunderstand me, I am not saying that Scripture isn't authoritative – it can be, but don't forget that if we look only at Scripture, we would probably think slavery is perfectly normal and acceptable and possibly blessed and authorised by God. I'll just give a couple of references here, but you'll find many, once you start looking.

Proverbs 12:9 says: -

Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.

Exodus 21: 2 says:

² "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. [read onto verse 11]

Leviticus 25: 42-46 says:

⁴² Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.

*⁴⁴ **"Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. ⁴⁵ You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. ⁴⁶ You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for***

life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.” [My emphases]

I hope you pick up the significance of those words I've put in bold. If you take the view that God dictated every word of the Bible you've got some difficult explaining to do! It seems that God assumes that slaves are part of society. He doesn't say: "***If*** you have slaves", but simply "Your slaves...". The expression used is a given – you ***will*** have slaves, and these are the ways you should treat them. Going on, in Leviticus, God says I can:

- take slaves from people who are not His children.
- I can buy some of the temporary foreigners living among us.
- I can bequeath them to my children (after all they are simply property, not people).
- I can make them slaves for life.
- There is also an implication that you can be ruthless with a slave, because an exception is added, when God says, "***but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.***" (Do it to a slave but not to a fellow Israelite!)

However, the earlier Exodus reference says you could take a slave from your own community, but release him after 7 years – that's a bit contradictory, isn't it?

That is why it was so hard to abolish slavery, because so many people said the Bible encourages/commends slavery and you can't argue against the verses you have just read.

Today, we all accept how wrong slavery is, that people have rights; that all are equal; that we have an obligation to respect others, giving them the dignity, they deserve. But obviously, in taking this line against slavery means that we set ourselves against the parts of the Bible that promote slavery, but most of us are happy to do that. Can you see the interesting problem we face?

I have always regarded myself as a Christian fundamentalist, although the current connotations of that word aren't helpful. Perhaps, I am slightly happier to be identified as a "red-letter" Christian (someone who focusses on the words of Jesus), although I'm uncomfortable that may seem to be identifying me as elitist, which I don't accept. Others may regard my openness to ideas outside the conservative tradition makes me more of a Liberal. I disagree, because when the term 'Liberal' is used in Christian circles it is as if you no longer regard the Bible as having anything to say and you can pick and choose which bits can be ignored and dismissed. For me, the Bible is even more important now, than before the change to my thinking.

Whatever I am, I fully accept (present tense) the Bible as being inspired by God and is His gift and guide for my life. However, there are a good number of issues where some conservatives will disagree with me, but my views are based on trying to marry what the Bible says, with what we have incontrovertibly proven in science, such as the examples used in the bullet-points a page or two back. Obviously, I would have to be stupid to insist on a 'Flat-Earth' these days and we must listen to

what science tells us, though we still need to critique new ideas. I like to think I have a Bible in one hand, and a 'test-tube' in the other – to adapt a phrase Billy Graham previously used. I have no problem allying science and the Bible – they are not in conflict.

Until around mid-2012, I adopted a soft line, non-affirming evangelical position towards LGBTQ+ folks. By "soft line" I mean I paid lip service but wasn't completely comfortable with the position. It came from my upbringing with family / friends / church / school. I was wrong. I never challenged my views because it looked black and white from the way I had been taught to view Scripture, and I didn't see any need to really look at the issue, because I didn't know any gay Christians. Another thing I used to struggle with was the idea that gay folks could be "Christians". How is that even possible? Now, having made LGBTQ+ friends, listened to and read a fair bit written by the LGBTQ+ community, as well as regularly worshipping with them, I must say that I know that many folks in all categories can be, and are, wholly spirit-filled and committed Christians, just as in the rest of church society.

Indeed, there are many well-known Christians who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, for example: a good number of significant politicians, including former Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Chris Bryant, Liberal Democrats Simon Hughes, and Tim Farron. In every walk of life there are high-profile gay and lesbian Christians. Within the specifically Christian community Vicky Beeching, the Theologian, Writer, Broadcaster and Keynote Speaker announced she was lesbian in 2014, and I will quote her a number of times through this document, because she has been so much in the public eye of the Christian community. As she came out during the period I was researching this material, she kept coming to my attention. There are 6-8 current clergy serving in the Church of England who are transgender, and many others who are part of other areas of the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

Maybe we find ourselves in a moment similar to the Apostle Peter, asking how Gentiles can possibly be Christian, and then finding God's Spirit has been poured out on them as well (Acts 10 & 11). It would be arrogant to assume I know who God has called and who He hasn't. However, we can get a clue by whether the fruit of the Spirit is evident in the person's life. Until 2012, I also mistakenly thought there was little to no information out there to challenge my views, so felt quite safe and didn't need to make any effort. Looking back, I had inadvertently created a sort of bubble that I lived in. I didn't see the pain. I just thought there was a handful of folks and they were largely irrelevant to me. Then I discovered how much pain I/we as Christians were causing. My eyes were opened. Now I find there is so much information out there, I simply couldn't and haven't, read it all. The volume of information is incredible and from my perspective, quite surprising, though it shouldn't be. To give you a flavour, you can start by looking at: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibl.htm. I like this site because it is generally dispassionate, and the issues are expressed without the heat and underlying rancour frequently found on certain sites. It is not a Christian site, but one dealing with anything coming under the religious/spiritual label. Some of what

they write I dislike, but it's good to read stuff that challenges your thinking, because you must work out why you disagree. So far, I haven't found a site that is as complete, detailed, and as fair in its representation of the issues. I have provided a list of other sites at the end, of each major section. Some I am in sympathy with, and others not, so just because I have included a link, doesn't mean I'm endorsing the site – some, I may differ with profoundly, if not in content, then attitude.

Christians across the land have different attitudes towards the LBGT+ community. I know that although most churches are non-affirming if you poke them with a stick, but within them there will be members with a variety of convictions towards the LGBTQ+ community. Some will be fully affirming, some hard-line non-affirming, some have never given it a thought, and some with a very uneasy anti-LGBTQ+ theology, because they may not have spent much time working it through from Scripture, but simply have a gut-feeling that to be anti-Gay is wrong. So, I would encourage anyone and everyone to make a proper attempt to dig deeply in the Scriptures and understand why you believe as you do – whatever your stance. Indeed, you need to be digging into Scripture to explore all sorts of issues: racism and white supremacy, immigration, homelessness, modern slavery, justice for the poor, etc.

Also read as much as you can from the viewpoint that is opposite to your own. Don't just read one article, as that is pretty lame, but look at information on at least half a dozen different websites, or 2-3 books. Websites tend to be more accessible, but books can cover issues to a greater depth. I also hope that all will be tolerant and respectful and can accept that everyone is entitled to their own thoughts, providing they do so as Servants of God under the Lordship of Christ.

This document is a personal attempt to clarify my own thinking on the specific issue of gender and sexuality. Because I personally faced issues relating to Trans and homosexuality, and both cause the church a lot of difficulty, I've had to work through my own Theology and come to a conclusion.

I think the main issue is that the church has traditionally denied the possibility of Transgender issues and Homosexuality in the 'light' of an inflexible binary gender system. The adherence to this system has *directly* caused the death of thousands in Europe alone, and *indirectly*, many more. There will be people who die today while I write this because of their sexuality, so, to my mind, the church has a lot of blood on its hands.

I write a lot about Transgender issues and Homosexuality and less extensively about Bisexuality. Why is that? In essence, probably because there is less resource material. In addition, my perception is that people with bi-sexuality are rarer, although I'm not sure of the extent. There is a certain amount of circumstantial evidence that bi-sexuality is easier to hide, and so I suspect there may be a lot more than we think. However, I think the principles discussed throughout this document can be easily applied to Bisexuals. I want to make a couple of points,

however. Based on everything I have read about the sexuality spectrum, as well as personal conversation, Bisexuals themselves are on a spectrum.

Bisexual spectrum. There will be Bisexuals who have:

Gay	A much greater bias to same sex, and much less to the opposite sex.	A stronger bias towards same sex, but slightly less to the opposite sex	A bias towards both genders equally.	A stronger bias towards the opposite sex, but slightly less to the same sex	A much greater bias to opposite sex, and much less to the same sex.	Straight
100%	85% / 15%	66% / 34%	50% / 50%	34% / 66%	15% / 85%	100%

Figure 1 - Don't get hung up on percentages or proportions. This is a simple table to illustrate a point, with no science data used.

If that table is correct, and logically it must be, if the work of Kinsey and many others stands up, there will be those who largely identify as straight but have a bit of a draw to those of the same sex. Likewise, there will be those who identify as gay, but who have a slight draw to the opposite sex. Then obviously there will be those who know they are equally attracted to both men and women. I suspect that if you can keep your head down as pass as straight without too much problem, you'll do so. Why put a target on your back if you don't have to?! And if you are mainly gay, you may feel it adds an unnecessary complication!

Generally, most folk who identify as bisexual would still tend to have one partner at a time, and be monogamous for the duration of the relationship, before moving on to the next partner, who may be of either gender. Over the years, there have been a number of stories about gay men who have 'successfully' undergone conversion therapy, so they are now apparently are attracted to women. Many within the Community, because of their own personal experience, suspect the people in these apparent success stories were never truly homosexual, but bisexual. That is speculative at best, though. I will cover this in much more detail later but mention it here as it may be pertinent.

At the time of writing, there is a popular TV series called S.W.A.T. based in Los Angeles, and one of the permanent characters (Officer Christina 'Chris' Alonso) gets involved in a complicated relationship with a soon-to-be-married couple – at their invitation, if not insistence. The wife is clearly bi-sexual, her husband straight and 'Chris' is lesbian. The relationship was an ongoing sub-plot running through the background of the series, and (Spoiler Alert:) eventually Chris has leaves the relationship, just before the wedding, because she feels nothing for the husband, although she loves the wife. I mention this to illustrate how complicated and fraught with problems, multiple relationships can get.

Our traditional understanding of Scripture teaches that God made woman for the man, and man for the woman, and, in the New Testament, that relationship was to be monogamous. It was to be a way of procreation, commitment, and relationship.

Our Western/European society currently sees ideal relationships as being monogamous, from largely Christian roots. Marriage, which again we'll look at in some detail later, although being a Christian institution (in the West), is largely influenced by the culture a person finds themselves. Some societies recognise polygamy, but many cultures recognise the best model is in pairs, because unless infanticide is practiced, genders at births tend to be fairly close to 50% male and 50% female, with very slightly more males than females (105 boys:100 girls).

So, for someone who is bi-sexual and in a relationship with one person, I believe God's call on that person would be to remain faithful to that person, regardless of what other urges they feel. Our current culture and understanding of Scripture, sees God's call to "straight" folk, to have one partner, and if we get urges to be drawn to someone else, we need to bring those urges under the Lordship of Christ. Hence, at present, I believe God calls Bi-sexual folk to a single partner, whether they appear outwardly "straight" or "gay." From where I now stand, I have no problem with someone who is bisexual dating someone who is female, and then if that relationship breaks down before they enter a covenantal relationship, dating someone who is male. Once they have made a commitment to a person, whatever their gender, they honour God by sticking with that person for good. If the spouse dies, and they find someone else, maybe of the opposite gender to their former spouse, again a monogamous commitment is required.

The main area of difficulty is that I find no Scriptural backing for concurrent multi-sex relationships. That situation presents a whole pile of problems: for example, we would probably argue that in a marriage, both partners are equal, and have equal rights to each other's bodies, and many wedding vows follow something akin to: "for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish..." If there were a third person in the relationship, the concept of equality of rights becomes more difficult to recognise in practice from the outset. Inevitably one person will become more dominant at the expense of one or both remaining partners, which is not the Biblical model, which I happily concede, is frequently a problem in common "straight" relationships as well, but would be even more complex where the relationship is greater than two.

There is a slightly grey area, and that is the area of polygamy. Over the span of time within which the Bible was written, the ethical and moral attitude towards Polygamy changed. In the Old Testament, nobody seems to have batted an eyelid, because it was part and parcel of the culture they were living in. By the time of the New Testament, the implication seems to be that most marriages were monogamous, but polygamous marriage still occurred as evidenced by the religious leader's question in Matthew 22: 23-28 – which we will address shortly. So, polygamy was very much a part of Jewish life, even into and beyond Jesus' day, though it had different labels, and gradually diminished, but it wouldn't stop entirely for another 1400 years after Jesus. On the one hand, you had a good number of men with more than one wife, and then you'd have others who took concubines, which we'll also look at in a moment. Finally, under Jewish law, when a man died leaving no children, the "brother must marry the widow and raise up

offspring for him” so that her former husband’s name would not die out. This is called Levirate Marriage and appears in the passage above: Matthew 22: 23-32 (also Mark 12:18-23 and Luke 20: 27-33). It is also very much part of the story of Ruth (ch 1: 11-13), including Boaz’s dilemma in Ruth 4. Anyway, we’ll take a closer look at polygamy in a page or so under the heading of: **Sexual relationships in the Bible.**

In our understanding and terms, we would say the concubine and redeemed widows became additional wives because the point of the relationship in each case was for sex, although really, they were more like property than wives, so at the time they weren’t seen as wives – because they were property, they just didn’t count. Just to clarify, wives were women whose fathers gave them to a potential husband with a dowry. In other words, he paid the husband to take her away. If a man paid a father for his daughter, she was a concubine. Slaves were just property, so if their owner married, they were also part of the package.

Theologically I find it difficult to justify one person having two concurrent partners of differing genders, because there is nothing to support it in Scripture. It seems to me that that type of relationship is likely to end in trouble, from the point of view that eventually there will be friction as one of the parties gets more attention than the other, or maybe one or more partners will be treated as submissive. Additionally, if we look at the makeup of that threesome: it’ll either be two males and one female, or two females and one male, which both strike me as being a problem if they are all equal parties to each other. Almost certainly one of them will be dominant, and so the complexity of the relationships can’t really be described adequately here. It’s really complicated because you have the concept of a man with two wives or a wife with two husbands, or a wife with a husband and wife, or ...! The sexual orientation of each member of the ‘threesome’ becomes difficult to get to grips with, in terms of marital equality. How do you bring an active faith into that type of dynamic? Given how pervasive marriage breakdowns are between two people, how much more likely is it in this context, when you have more relationship dynamics going on? In a relationship of two people, you have two relationships: my perception of my relationship with my spouse and my spouse’s perception of her relationship with me. I might think everything is hunky dory, and my spouse is thinking things aren’t so good because.... In a three-way relationship, you have six relationships to consider (each party has a relationship with two other spouse’s). At present, justifying a gay or lesbian relationship seems a walk in the park by comparison! (This is why extra-marital relationships will end in tears.)

Another added difficulty is what happens when a relationship goes through tension. Let’s say A is having difficulty with B, and C is not involved. How long will it be before C starts to side with one or the other, and from there it’s a short step to increase of tension, exclusion of one of the parties. After all, it happens frequently in traditional marriage relationships. And then you need to add in children. Consider the pains and unhappiness that breakups bring to the family.

Accepting this is a rare situation, my reaction is that there is nothing in Scripture that gives a green light to concurrent bi-sexuality, and I therefore, at this time with my current understanding, have to say I cannot accept this type as a valid form of sexual expression.

However, it's not really possible to write down a response that covers every eventuality, and it may need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, in much the same way that leaders of churches decide whether they can in good conscience marry folk who have previously married and divorced.

Fortunately, the law of the land says I can only have one spouse, and this ties-in quite nicely with my current understanding of New Testament teaching. And normally, for most people, one spouse is quite enough, thank you!

– Chapter 3 –

Sexual relationships and the Bible

We like to think that there is only one type of acceptable sexual relationship that God approves of, and that is one man and one woman. Sadly, it isn't that simple.

- **Polygamy.** Just now we mentioned Polygamy, and I want to come back to that for a moment because, I also recognise it isn't cut and dried, in that many of the Old Testament characters had more than one wife, and God didn't say much about it. Just for sake of clarity, understand that various terms can be used. Polygyny – a man with multiple wives; Polyandry – a woman with multiple husbands; Group Marriage – multiple husbands with multiple wives; Fraternal polyandry - a marriage of two or more brothers and one woman; Sororate marriage - a marriage of two or more sisters and one man. For simplicity, I'm just going to use the over-arching term Polygamy as it can cover all these in one word. Almost all the Biblical examples are really those of polygyny. This is not exhaustive, but first of all, consider:
 - The earliest instance is Lamech, the sixth-generation descendant from Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve. Genesis 4: 19 says:
¹⁹ Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. They were clearly concurrent wives from the context of verses 19-24.
 - Abraham (see Genesis 16: 1-4; 25: 1-2.), & Jacob (who began with an example of sororate marriage, which became polygynous over time, Genesis 29: 16 – 30: 10). Esau also had several wives, and although he doesn't appear in the "commended" column of God's list, it demonstrates that polygyny was culturally acceptable, if not fairly normal – Genesis 28: 8-9.
 - possibly Moses, with his Cushite (Ethiopian) wife as well as Zipporah – Scripture isn't clear whether Zipporah was still alive when he married again, so we'll be cautious!).
 - Gideon (aka Jerub-Baal) – the Bible writers tell us about how cowardly and normal Gideon seemed to be, the magnificence of the victory he led, and how he saw an opportunity to get some gold out of it. At the end, we are told he had a huge number of children, from "many wives" – and a concubine. There is no criticism, just reportage:

²⁹ Jerub-Baal son of Joash went back home to live. ³⁰ He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. ³¹ His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelek. (Judges 8)

In a sense, this detail was necessary, so the author of Judges could go on and talk about a murderous bloodbath involving all his offspring. When God/the angel first meets Gideon, He makes no comment about his family arrangements ("Gideon, before you go off and become a mighty warrior of great renown, you need to get rid of all

your wives, except the first one you married.” – No, that didn’t happen, but a lot of us evangelical Christians would be a lot happier if it did!) but simply tells him about the plans he has to use this ‘mighty warrior’ (Judges 6: 12). It’s possible Gideon got all his wives after the victory, so, if that is the case, why did God not tell him to sort things out. But God is silent. Make of that what you will.

- A similar passage later in Judges 12:8-10, 13-14

⁸ After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel. ⁹ He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan, and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan. Ibzan led Israel seven years. ¹⁰ Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

¹³ After him, Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel.

¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He led Israel eight years.

- Elkanah – the father of Samuel (1 Samuel 1: 1-2) where God shows a special love towards the childless but faithful Hannah, resulting in her eventually becoming pregnant with Samuel. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah, and the text makes absolutely no comment on the rightness of having two wives – it was simply a fact and no more. The fact that the Old Testament writers do not seem to take a view on these types of relationship, could indicate that in their minds they do not see an issue. However, the writers are quick to judge the post-Davidic kings, making comments such as this one about Baasha in 1 Kings 15: 34: -

“He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the ways of Jeroboam and committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit.”

The writers are only interested in showing the spiritual sin of the ruler which is normally idolatry - never the number of wives.

- In 1 Chronicles 7: 1-4, we read:

¹ The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron—four in all.

² The sons of Tola: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam and Samuel—heads of their families. During the reign of David, the descendants of Tola listed as fighting men in their genealogy numbered 22,600.

³ The son of Uzzi: Izrahiah. The sons of Izrahiah: Michael, Obadiah, Joel and Ishiah. All five of them were chiefs.

⁴ According to their family genealogy, they had 36,000 men ready for battle, **for they had many wives and children.**

This is quite significant because we read here that it is not just the rulers who had many wives, but it seems this whole branch of the tribe of Issachar regarded it as normal to have multiple wives. Chronicles was written after the return from exile, and in the early chapters, gives a potted history of the family trees of the tribes.

In the next chapter we have the genealogy of Saul, and part-way through that we have these interesting verses:

⁸ Sons were born to Shaharaim in Moab after he had divorced his wives Hushim and Baara.

⁹ By his wife Hodesh he had Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malkam, ¹⁰ Jeuz, Sakia and Mirmah. These were his sons, heads of families.

¹¹ By Hushim he had Abitub and Elpaal.

Here we have a man who had divorced two wives and married another couple of wives. There is no indication in the text that there was anything exceptional or special – other than Saul came through his lineage, so from both these passages we can see polyandry, or polygamy, was fairly common practice.

- David (2 Samuel 5: 13; 1 Chronicles 3: 1-4; and there were others because Bathsheba's son Solomon isn't mentioned in either passage.) We will mention Solomon in a moment, but sticking with David, we ought to mention 2 Samuel 12: 8 where Nathan is convicting David of his sin with Bathsheba, and quotes God saying:

"⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more".

The implication is that not just land and treasures, but further wives would have been given, if David had asked – since taking an additional wife was the charge brought against David. 1 Chronicles 3 indicates David had children from a minimum of seven wives excluding those from all his concubines. If you look at 2 Samuel 3 (a companion passage to the above, where the names more or less agree, between the two passages), we are given the names of six children, each to a different mother, then in 2 Samuel 5: 13, we are told that: "¹³ After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him." So, he probably had far more than seven wives, excluding concubines!

- Sticking with David for a moment longer, his first wife was Michal the daughter of Saul. However, when David was being chased around the

countryside by Saul, it seems Michal stayed in the palace, and as Saul hated David so much, he married Michal off again to another man, Paltiel. Some years go by and Saul is killed, and David is made king of Judah. The rest of the tribes make Ish-Bosheth, son of Saul, king in Saul's place. After a turbulent 7½ years as king of Judah, David is made king of the whole country, but his price is to have Michal back. 2 Samuel 3: 13-16 says:

¹³ "Good," said David. "I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me." ¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins." ¹⁵ So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. ¹⁶ Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back.

At this stage, David already had six wives, and they had all given him sons (and presumably some unnamed daughters). In the light of verse 16, it sounds like Michal is now in a settled and loving relationship, so from our cultural vantage point, it seems callous and wrong to break up that relationship, taking away someone else's only(?) wife. It also seems to be in contravention with Deuteronomy 24:1-4. So, Michal comes to join the rest of the wives, leaving her husband desolate. David didn't need Michal – she was simply a political pawn purely for David's self-interest. (Compare this to the story of Bathsheba, for which David was later condemned.) I suspect the real reason for taking Michal was to demonstrate his (political) authority, due to the fact she was one of the few remaining close family members of Saul, whom Saul had given to him. This might make it politically easier with those who were still supporters of Saul. But does that make it right? In addition, Michal had no rights of her own and was really nothing more than property. Although Michal loved David when she was first given to him, it seems she has little time for him now (probably 10+ years later) given her response when the Ark was brought into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6):

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

If her feelings for David were normally respectful and supportive, even if she didn't approve of David's dancing, she wouldn't have been so acerbic, so I imagine their relationship wasn't that great in any case,

and reading between the lines there is no evidence David loved her. Looking at it today, it makes me wonder whether David should have simply left Michal with Paltiel, but we don't know what else was going on. Having her marriage broken up surely didn't help her mood, and clearly, she wasn't David's "go-to" "Number 1 Wife"!

- Then we must mention Solomon (1 Kings 11: 3 – 700 wives and 300 concubines, and not a peep is heard from God to say polygamy is wrong! In fact, God blesses Solomon, and his sexual relationships seem irrelevant) – in fact, most of the kings had multiple wives. I need to be fair: God DID say something about multiple wives, through Moses farewell speech in Deuteronomy, where we read in chapter 17:

*¹⁴ When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. ¹⁶ The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ **He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.** He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.*

To clarify that, God doesn't address polygamy as such, because He didn't say you can't have more than one wife, but that you shouldn't have "many" wives. After a good number of years as king, Solomon went on to prove the verse right, although I'm sure his problems were as much instigated by pride, along with trying to appease the desires of his wives to worship their own gods.

Solomon is an interesting King because although he had all these wives and concubines, for most of his life he devoutly worshipped God, and on one occasion demonstrated he was living by the Laws of Moses because we read in 2 Chronicles 8, that:

¹¹ Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, "My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the Lord has entered are holy.""

As a foreigner, she would not be allowed into the temple of God, not even as Solomon's wife.

The fact is that Solomon's many wives and children were seen as a blessing from God (see Psalm 128: 3-4. Also note that of the 613 commandments in the Torah, the first command is to "be fruitful and

multiply"). So, if God says nothing, and the nation views it as a blessing from God, how can multiple wives (2, 3, ... 700) be a problem? It seems to be a lifestyle choice based on economics and politics in Solomon's instance, but also of social protection of the vulnerable as in Levirate marriage. We can't make the argument that after Jesus, polygamy is a sin but beforehand it wasn't. Either it's a sin or it isn't, and the Bible presents no compelling evidence that it regards it as a sin. The Bible does give basic principles that it considers important in marriage but doesn't legislate the form. We can happily say that we culturally disapprove of polygamous marriage, and attest that it is difficult to have a covenantal relationship with two or more spouses, so polygamy may not be a good model. But we can't make a strong argument that the Bible thinks it is wrong/sinful.

When Jesus came, he tightened up the Law: for example, as He said in Matthew 5 regarding lust:

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Lust didn't suddenly become a sin. It would have always been one, although the penny hadn't dropped for many folk, so if it's a sin after Jesus, it would have been one before Him, though from a legal position, they couldn't be convicted (See 2 Samuel 13 as an example of lust and its consequences). (As an aside, in our culture new laws are designed when we realise 'bad' behaviour is occurring and no law currently prohibits it. This is so we can penalize it in the future. The important thing is that we already realize it is wrong, even though no law covers it.)

Jesus didn't say much about what type of relationships were permissible and what weren't. He didn't tell the woman at the well to leave the relationship she was in, but simply referenced it. We are not told whether her relationship continued – it is simply not important. The point I'm making is that polygamy cannot be a sin in the eyes of Scripture, either in the Old Testament or the New. I believe Scripture is more interested in the righteousness, sincerity, integrity, and honesty of the parties to a relationship than the actual components of that relationship. After all, different cultures have different norms, although here in the west (as in many parts of the world) we see our culture saying that one man and one woman is the norm, although other composites are becoming acceptable.

From a Christian standpoint, I think the strongest argument against Polygamy is that the relationship we have with our spouse should be a mutual Covenantal one and it is difficult to have a truly covenantal

experience when there are three or more in the relationship. By Covenantal, I mean a relationship where both parties respect and honour each other at a deep level, being prepared to sacrifice yourself for the blessing of your spouse. How can you have that type of relationship with two other people, and they with you? Almost by definition, it becomes either more patriarchal, or matriarchal. However, western society isn't likely to accept polygamy – except in Utah – anytime soon! Probably, one major issue stopping polygamy is the increased expense of supporting an additional spouse, and the potential jealousies if one spouse gets more attention than the other, and I'm sure you can add others!

- Returning to our history lesson, you can add:
 - Solomon's son, Rehoboam, had 18 wives and 60 concubines. (2 Chronicles 11: 21-23)
 - the Godly king, Joash 2 Chronicles 24
 - the many other kings who had multiple wives as part of international treaties
 - Perhaps Esther, a Jewess who became the **second** wife of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I). Some stories indicate that Ahasuerus's first wife, Vashti, later became Queen again after Esther, although the circumstances and history is unclear.
 - Herod the Great, the King of Judea, also known as the King of the Jews, who had 9 wives, though not all at the same time. However, several were wives simultaneously. This was the Herod who killed all the boys under 2yrs old in Bethlehem. So polygamy was still going on at the time of Jesus.

For the kings, it only became a problem in Scripture when they introduced foreign idols – as they did for Solomon. And maybe that is the issue: Each person in a relationship brings their own culture and way of thinking, and in a good marriage, the 'two' become one. Not so likely in a three-way family.

Rabbi Naftali Silberberg makes the point that *"In all probability, polygamy was always considered a last-resort option for men who were married to barren women and who wished to have children without divorcing the wives they loved."*

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/558598/jewish/Does-Jewish-Law-Forbid-Polygamy.htm

Another strange character is the prophet Hosea who married a prostitute. She then leaves him for another man, and God tells Hosea to go and get her back. Hosea then buys her back with silver and barley, and she is obliged to then remain faithful to Hosea "for many days". See Hosea 3. So much of that story is in direct contravention to the Mosaic Law and we will look at that again later in the document. This is therefore an example of a woman with multiple partners although the sense from the story is one of

disapproval. Some may argue that the life and ministry of Hosea is often considered to be symbolic of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel and it may therefore be a kind of parable and not to be taken too literally. However, if it is purely a parable, the problem is that words are put in God's mouth that seem to run counter to His character and His normal instructions (given how fundamentally important the Law was):

² When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD." (Hosea 1)

¹ The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. (Hosea 3)

To me the story of Hosea raises many difficulties. Why did God tell him:

- To marry a prostitute? Leviticus 21: 7 says about priests: *"They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God."* Hosea was a prophet called directly by God – not unlike a priest.
- To remarry Gomer? Under "God's" Law given through Moses, she should have been stoned for adultery (along with her new husband). Why wasn't she? Even in Jesus' day the Pharisees sought to stone a woman, till Jesus shamed them.

The story seems to imply the ends justify the means (to teach a lesson), which is not a Biblical ethic. I don't think you can say it's okay to set aside the Law because we are telling a story, and God is the teacher. That seems morally and ethically questionable.

However, Gomer's relationships are not dealt with under the terms of the Law, and in fact the Law is barely acknowledged.

We talked about characters who were involved in polygamous relationships, but, in fact, if you look at the Old Testament Mosaic Law, there seems to be tacit approval that men would frequently have more than one wife. As part of the initial law-giving Moses talks about treatment of various people and in Exodus 21: 10-11 we read:

¹⁰ **If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.** ¹¹ **If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.**

The wife in this case is a servant (a concubine), and the payment referred to is that required from her, so she can go free. If the servant wanted to be free they had to pay their master a redemption price, so here we see that God provides for the needs of the woman by indicating she can go free

without paying her master if he fails to provide for her needs. The more important aspect here is that there is no implicit or explicit number of wives that can be taken, and the phrase “If he marries another woman” is simply made as a statement of a norm.

In Deuteronomy 21: 15, when dealing with the rights of a firstborn, we read:

¹⁵ If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, ¹⁶ when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. ¹⁷ He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.

It is simply presented as a fact – as a norm. Then in Leviticus 18 we are given instructions about whom we cannot have relationships with, and we read:

⁷ “Do not dishonour your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. ⁸ “Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonour your father. ⁹ “Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere. ¹⁰ “Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonour you. ¹¹ “Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister.”

At one level, there seems to be a certain amount of duplication in these verses unless we are talking about the fact that your father could have had a two, or more, wives. So, the passage says we can't have sex with either our mother, or our father's wife – which for most of us is quite distasteful anyway! Getting beyond that however, Moses is inferring that our father may have more than one wife. Then in verse 18 we are told: “Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.” Implicit in that comment is that you can take someone else as a second or 'rival' wife otherwise the passage would simply say “do not take a second, or rival, wife”!

We have already mentioned Jacob marrying Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29), so it seems the cultural norms have changed over the intervening years.

I'm sure you'll ask about the New Testament, so let's take a look. It's not nearly so cut and dried as one might imagine. When Jesus was walking the hills of Galilee the only 'Bible' available to him, were the library of individual books making up the Old Testament. These were largely collated by the 3rd

century BC, so Jesus would have been familiar with them. It is therefore interesting that when Jesus is teaching the people what we call the Beatitudes, he says in Matthew 5: 17-20:

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's explain that phrase, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

In this context, "abolish" is set in opposition to "fulfill." Christ came "...not to abolish, but to fulfill." Jesus did not come to this earth for the purpose of acting as an opponent of the law. His goal was not to prevent its fulfillment. Rather, He revered it, loved it, obeyed it, and brought it to fruition. He fulfilled the law's prophetic utterances regarding Himself (Luke 24:44). Christ fulfilled the demands of the Mosaic law If, however, the law of Moses bears the same relationship to men today, in terms of its binding status, then it was not fulfilled, and Jesus failed at what He came to do. On the other hand, if the Lord did accomplish His goal, then the law was fulfilled, and it is not a binding legal institution today. Further, if the law of Moses was not fulfilled by Christ—and thus remains as a binding legal system for today—then it is not just partially binding. Rather, it is a totally compelling system. Jesus plainly said that not one "jot or tittle" (representative of the smallest markings of the Hebrew script) would pass away until all was fulfilled. Consequently, nothing of the law was to fail until it had completely accomplished its purpose. Jesus fulfilled the law. Jesus fulfilled all of the law. We cannot say that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system, but did not fulfill the other aspects of the law. Jesus either fulfilled all of the law, or none of it. What Jesus' death means for the sacrificial system, it also means for the other aspects of the law. <https://www.gotquestions.org/abolish-fulfill-law.html>

So, either it applies, or it doesn't—there are no half measures: we'll have this bit of the law, but not that. You can perhaps use it as a guide, but you can't use it to 'convict' anyone of sin. We answer to a higher standard, the law of Love: love God, love His Son, love others, love ourselves (in the sense of having a Godly regard, respect and care of ourselves, not the self-absorbed love of Narcissus). In a sense this shows just what a weak and inadequate word, our English word, 'love' is. We do not kill, not because the Mosaic Law says so, but because we care for the other person and we don't want to bring harm to them, or the family group and friends to which they belong. We do not commit adultery, steal, or gossip, for similar reasons. We want good things to happen to people, not bad. We want God's grace.

If we say that what Jesus was saying was that the Law still applies in totality today, that makes a nonsense of the rest of His teaching (and of course Paul's letter to the Romans), for example when He is walking through the cornfields and the Disciples start to break up grain in their hands and eat it. The Pharisees condemned them, but Jesus sets aside the Law. The Law required the woman caught in adultery to be stoned, but on that occasion, Jesus set aside that law. Logically, it seems that Jesus says the Law applies to protect people, but it can be set aside when, by having to obey it, it either causes harm, or it stops good things from happening.

There is another passage where Jesus gets involved in a discussion about the Law, this time in a situation revolving around multiple wives and that is the passage from Matthew 22: 24-32:

²⁴ "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷ Finally, the woman died. ²⁸ Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" ²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (Check the same story in Mark 12:18-23 and Luke 20: 27-33.)

As good Christians, we should perhaps expect Jesus to say something about the intention of marriage being between only two people. Why didn't he? Levirate marriage was intended to protect the deceased husband's name so that it would not "be blotted out of Israel." The surviving brother, who may

already have a wife, would also marry his deceased brother's wife. It provided continuity of the dead brother's name, but also had the benefit of providing security for the childless widow. If the only acceptable marriage in God's eyes was between one man and one woman, why didn't Jesus make a comment here? It was the perfect opportunity. A short time earlier, in Matthew 19, when Jesus was being challenged about divorce, he said that Moses allowed divorce only because of their hardness of hearts, but this time he simply accepts the situation. It is almost as though from a divine perspective, and perhaps in the big picture of salvation and eternity, that marriage isn't that important in terms of the number of spouses. However, what does seem important is the quality of relationship and treatment of others. From the passage above, it's clear that it wasn't unknown for folks to have more than one spouse at the time Jesus lived. Do we know for certain that true Polygamy occurred during Jesus time on Earth? It wasn't permitted by the Romans, but it was practiced by a few in Israel. In my searches, I came across this reference:

- *"In the Second Temple period, Jewish society was, at least theoretically, polygamous, like other oriental societies of the time but in contrast to the neighboring Greek and Roman societies...." [HI:JWGRP:85] (PJ – Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry Into Image and Status by Tal Ilan)*
- *"There is evidence of the practice of polygamy in Palestinian Judaism in NT times (cf. J. Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, 1969, 90, 93, 369f.). Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.) had ten wives (Josephus, Ant. 17, 19f.; War 1,562) and a considerable harem (War 1,511). Polygamy and concubinage among the aristocracy is attested by Josephus, Ant. 12, 186ff.; 13, 380; War 1, 97. The continued practice of levirate marriage (Yeb. 15b) evidently led to polygamy, which was countenanced by the school of Shammai but not by that of Hillel. [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Colin Brown, eds. Zond.:s.v. "Marriage, adultery, bride, bridegroom"] <http://christianthinktank.com/polygame.html>*

Jesus makes no comment about what forms of marriage were acceptable and what weren't. The only comments he is recorded to have made were in the Matthew 5 and 19 passages to say that Divorce isn't acceptable. Clearly the Early Church fairly quickly came to think that having multiple wives wasn't a good thing, but among Jews it was slower to change. I wonder whether Christianity's early embracement by 'Gentiles' (specifically those in the Roman world where Polygamy wasn't part of the culture) helped form this monogamous thinking. From the Jewish standpoint, polygamy wasn't outlawed until much later. We read:

In the early 11th century, Rabbi Gershorn B. Judah issued a decree, which prohibited polygamy among the Jews. Because this happened several hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ, we can assume that many Jewish men were still taking more than one wife. Jewish polygyny lasted in Spain until the 14th century, but has died out since.

<http://peopleof.oureverydaylife.com/did-jews-practice-polygamy-time-jesus-9359.html>

The assumption of that paragraph must be fairly safe, because you wouldn't need to prohibit something unless it was happening!

Interestingly, even today Polygamy is widely accepted throughout much of Africa, the Middle East and across as far as Myanmar (Burma) and Indonesia. There are a handful of countries in Africa, where it is a criminal offence – as it is in Israel, and a similar number where it is not permitted, but not criminalised if it occurs (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy>).

However, although a man was legally allowed to marry more than one wife, other than kings and princes, very few used this right – usually because you needed to be fairly wealthy to afford to keep a second (or third, or ...) wife (and their children). As a rule, the ordinary Jew lived in monogamous marriage.

Although we are in the unsafe area of conjecture, it seems entirely possible that Jesus wouldn't have objected to a widow marrying her dead husband's brother even if he were already married, because he was a Jew and upheld the Law. When we marry, we talk about becoming one with our spouse, so, logically, it seems we can 'become one' with more than one woman (given that I'm a man!) with no Biblical prohibition.

I want to touch on one more passage, and this one is written by Paul to Timothy. The passage is from 1 Timothy 3 and particularly verses 2 & 12. In older translations, the passage seems to allude to polygamy, because in the Revised Standard Version for example v2 reads:

² Now a bishop must be above reproach, **the husband of one wife**, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher,

And verse 12 reads:

¹² Let deacons be the **husband of one wife**, and let them manage their children and their households well

However, the more modern versions like the New Living Translation, the Source New Testament and NIV (used here) read:

² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

¹² *A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

Hence the passage is about **faithfulness** not multiple wives. You can also check it in The Complete Jewish Bible, whilst The Message uses the term “committed”. The phrases about being faithful are used on epitaphs of the time and meant a “one-woman man” or a “one-man woman”. We know that translators were wrong when they used the expression “husband of one wife”, and the more recent translations have got it spot on. The Source New Testament, by Dr A Nyland has a very helpful contextual footnote about society at the time Paul wrote to Timothy, and although it could be quoted later in the essay, I’ll include it here, so you can remember it later:

Timothy was being told to make sure his deacons were not sexually immoral, which was very difficult in a society where you were allowed to sleep with your slaves and where a host was expected to provide prostitutes after a banquet. “Divorce and Remarriage in the Church.” Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities, Great Britain, 2003, p. 177.

Bear in mind that it was common for men to be unfaithful, but not for wives. Historically, it was socially accepted in Roman society for men to be unfaithful. At the time of Paul's preaching, 5-10% of pregnancies ended in the death of the mother. Augustus had made changes to family law in 18 and in 17 B.C. and in A.D. 9. He as good as forced upper-class couples to reproduce by restricting inheritance rights if they failed to reproduce. The law prohibited unmarried men between the ages of 20 and 60, and unmarried widowed and divorced women between 18 and 50 from receiving inheritances. Women were expected to have one child by the age of 20, men by the age of 25, while widows were expected to remarry within a year, and a divorced woman within 6 months. Roman law under Augustus enabled a woman to be released from guardianship if she produced children: three in the case of a freeborn woman, and four in the case of a freed slave. The quota of three was usually fulfilled by the time a woman was 20. Augustan laws encouraged Roman parents to keep the first three children, but further children, whether girls or boys, were usually exposed (left out to die). Girls as well as boys counted in Augustus' requirement of three. The taking in and subsequent adoption of an exposed child was forbidden by law.

Women often became pregnant again soon after giving birth. Multiple pregnancies were responsible for high mortality rates. Women often turned to abortion after the requisite three children, but some drugs taken for this purpose resulted in

death. Physicians commonly refused to perform an abortion by instrument on the grounds that abortion could be a means of concealing adultery, and a physician who performed such an abortion was liable to the same penalties as the adulterers. The law did not penalize abortion, but did penalize the death of the mother. Note that adultery was opposed purely on the grounds of protecting rights of inheritance, not on moral grounds. Wives usually stopped having sex with the husband after the third child, partly to avoid having to expose the child, and partly because of the high likelihood of the wife's death with multiple pregnancies. Childbirth commonly was fatal. By setting the law at three children, upper-class women were protected from the risks of birth. Women who were celibate (and thus preserved their lives) were greatly admired. This was not the case with men. Yet a man who produced more than three children with his wife was labelled with the insulting term *uxorious*². Men were encouraged to have sex with concubines, freed women, or female slaves, thus again protecting the wife from the danger of death through childbirth. Roman code imposed duties on concubines and compelled them to remain faithful to their master. Some wives chose a concubine for their husbands. The upper-class women were thus spared the threat of death by multiple births. This was the case in Roman, Greek and Jewish society: all three regulated sexual reproduction in order to keep upper-class women alive.

Polygamy was still practiced among Palestinian Jews, although was not supposed to occur in Graeco-Roman society. Legal Jewish marriages allowed for polygamy. For example, P. Yadin 10 (Palestine, 126 AD) is a marriage contract between Judah and his second wife Babatha. That is to say, Judah had another wife, and upon his marriage to Babatha, was married to two women at once. P. Yadin 10 is an Aramaic contract. Judah chose a Greek marriage contract for his daughter's marriage two years later (P. Yadin 18) but for his polygamous marriage, had to choose an Aramaic contract.

From: *The Source New Testament*, by Dr A. Nyland, p414

That last paragraph is referring to genuine civil documents of the period. Much of what we have just read seems quite foreign to our own experience but is very helpful in explaining the context of Jesus' and Paul's teaching. However, I would say all of that is a semantic argument, in that it is still one spouse, but the emphasis is switched from it being a comment against

² PJ: doting upon, foolishly fond of, or affectionately submissive toward one's wife - www.dictionary.com

polygamy, to a comment about the attitude people should have towards their spouse.

- **Concubinary.** Let's deal with concubinary away from polygamy. As a reminder, the differences between a wife and a concubine were that the wife was given by her father along with a dowry; and the concubine was purchased as a slave from her father normally for the purposes of sex. To quote from David H. Engelhart on the <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/concubine/> web site:

The practice of taking concubines as "wife" was used to provide a male heir for a barren wife (cf. Gen. 16, 35, 36). In addition, the practice provided a social safety net for poor families who could sell their daughters in dire times (Exodus 21: 7-10; Judges 19: 1). It seems plausible to suggest that the practice of taking concubines was perpetuated to meet the sexual desires of the males and/or to cement political alliances between nations. Nevertheless, the paucity of sufficient internal data requires dependence on comparative ancient Near Eastern evidence for these conclusions. Multiplying children through concubines would not normally complicate the inheritance lines, but would increase the available family workforce and the family wealth.

In the same article it tells us:

Concubines are mentioned primarily in early Israelite history during patriarchal times, the period of the judges, and the early monarchy although some later kings also had concubines. While concubines did not have the same status as wives, they were not to be mistreated (Exodus 21: 7-10) nor could they be violated by other males (Genesis 35: 22) with impunity (Genesis 49: 3-4). They seem to have received higher status if they bore sons, or at least they are remembered by name (Genesis 21: 10 ; 22: 24 ; 30: 3 and 36: 12).

A concubine could not choose to "marry" her master because of her slave status, although her master could marry her. For her, the relationship was exclusive and ongoing, though she could be elevated in status if her master so chose. Nevertheless, the reality was that her status was always that of a slave, who may also have a sexual relationship with her master. As we have said, Concubines in Israel possessed many of the same rights as legitimate wives, without the same respect. There are laws recorded providing for their protection (Exodus 21: 7-9) and setting limits to the relationship they held with the household to which they belonged (Genesis 21: 14; 25: 6). They had no authority in the family, nor could they share in running the household.

Maybe the conclusion we can draw is that the number of 'wives' isn't that important in the scheme of things; it is how they are treated and the respect they are

afforded. Many relationships I believe to be wrong not because of the number, but because of abuse and lack of respect. Some people treat their sexual partner(s) as no better than a piece of meat - they are a possession to be treated "as I choose", and it doesn't matter what others think. That is wholly and completely wrong and flies in the face of Scripture.

Returning to our journey!

It was necessary to look at other relationships the Bible sees as acceptable, or at least doesn't condemn as unacceptable, because they are clearly not acceptable today - I would posit more for cultural reasons than theological, though theology does play a part.

I now need to return to our introduction to our theme of Trans and gay/lesbian theology. Because it is difficult to get everything nicely structured and in a logical order for both Trans and gay/lesbian situations, the style I will use is that I may write as if assuming every situation is acceptable in God's eyes, but that device is only used to allow comparisons to be made as we go along, as you see from the following paragraph. Whether they are ultimately acceptable to God, will be discussed in due course. In all these LGBTQ+ issues, my theology requires me to apply the same relationship conditions that I believe apply to the "straight" Christian, and these are the caveats I referred to much earlier:

- When searching for a partner, going on a date, I believe the same principles apply as for a "straight" Christian. The relationship grows as you get to know each other over weeks and months, and if sex is a gift from God, it is only acceptable in a permanent, stable and committed relationship (ideally marriage or a civil partnership). I know that sounds simplistic and possibly unachievable for someone who is gay, but it seems most consistent with respecting lifelong commitments, and keeping the intimacy to within a committed and stable relationship.
- There is no room at all for one-night stands. Both partners need to remain faithful. Just as with "straight" people, promiscuity simply is **not** acceptable. The Bible teaches faithfulness in relationships, so whatever the relationship, I believe you cannot have multiple concurrent partners or short-term physical relationships. From where I stand at present, and I can't see any likelihood of change, I believe this to be non-negotiable. Regardless of sexual orientation, relationships are designed to be permanent – to have a short term sexual relationship with someone and move on to someone else later, is not acceptable, as I've just said. (I accept that in the case of the homosexual, many 'gay or lesbian' folk may not until recently have had anything exactly like a marriage, so there is no motivation to stay in relationships that have soured. However, if one applies Christian principles, they should be encouraged towards a civil partnership or marriage, to provide a similar degree of commitment, responsibility and permanence as is experienced in a traditional marriage. There should also be encouragement to work through the difficult times of relationship, as should happen with a straight relationship, though clearly that may not always be possible in every

case! Ending of any relationship ought to be as difficult for the homosexual as it is for those who are straight – and the last throw of the dice.) Although I understand that legally, in what is termed Same Sex Marriage, there is no requirement for fidelity – I believe that where Christians are involved, it should be a given that this is acknowledged in the vows made. Faithfulness is non-negotiable – “forsaking all others, as long as we both shall live” - and sometimes, within every relationship this must be worked at.

In all of the above I fully recognise that many relationships fail, but we have to set standards and always work to maintain those standards, and if they fail it must always be seen to be a tragedy, whether straight or gay.

Before I move on, perhaps we need to investigate the place of sex in the above. Traditionally, and in line with Bible teaching, the man and woman become one in the eyes of God through the act of sexual intercourse. From my perspective I would transfer that thinking into the LGBTQ+ situation for the Christian. If neither party has a faith, the rules will not be recognised, because the parties do not recognise God, even though He loves them. I would say intercourse/“sex act” still has a significance of ‘becoming one’ for the Christian Lesbian, Gay and Transgender. Part of the reason for the significance of the two becoming one, is that in the original (male/female) union, there was the potential for a new life to result. In fact, through much of history, sex was solely for procreation, and sex at any other time (for pleasure) was frowned upon, because that was lust. In LGBTQ+ unions, procreation cannot occur, so you could argue that part of the ‘magic’ of union is removed. I think I would still argue however, that there is still a kind of magic, or bonding, in the sex act where two become one, in whatever type of union is involved, but this is a highly personal view. Don’t forget Jesus’ words when he was addressing the problem of adultery:

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5.

So, if the thought is there in the imagination, so is the intent, so in the eyes of God a bonding has already taken place in the heart.

As I understand it from conversations, the gay and lesbian is likely to have a lower view of the significance of sex. One of the reasons why intercourse has traditionally been revered is because of the chance of conception, so we take care, but this isn’t relevant for the gay and lesbian. As a Christian, I will obviously have a problem with that, because I believe it to be a gift from God, but I must recognise that for the gay/lesbian, especially for someone without faith, the idea of viewing sex as special and God-given, is daft. However, I would like to hope that the Christian gay will hold a higher view of sex, but I’m not sure they will, especially when young and discovering their sexuality. The problem will be “I’ve been told one thing, but my body and experiences can’t understand and relate to that. I don’t want to be, but I’m different, and I can’t relate to what people say I should be feeling”. In that context, it’s going to be difficult to expect chastity, even for a Christian. Unless

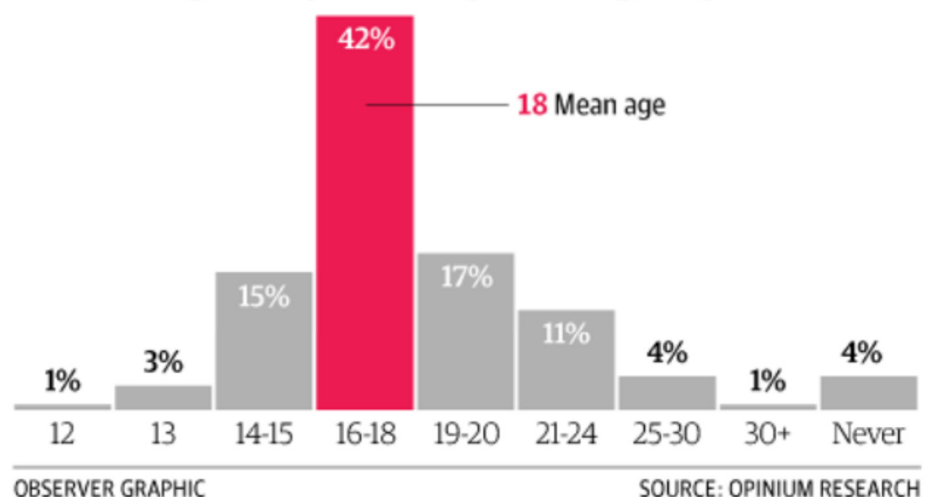
they have had a strong personal Christian faith and upbringing, and continue to have a Christian support as they work through the discovery that they are gay or lesbian, if the teaching they have received has been 'don't have sex outside marriage because you might get pregnant', this will just be irrelevant and might as well come from a different planet. We must recognise that in our secular society, young people tend to have sex fairly early in a relationship, and at younger ages (it's up to the reader to determine the definition of the word "early!"). By way of context, it should also be remembered that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was likely to have been little more than twelve when she was betrothed to Joseph. Joseph may have been a very much older widower according to the Apocryphal gospel, 'History of Joseph the Carpenter'. In ancient Israelite times, girls as could be betrothed at a very young age, but the marriage could not be consummated till she reached puberty (10 to 13yrs, though most would be nearer 16-years old when married, I understand – but do your own internet searches!). In this article they suggest betrothal could occasionally happen as young as three, but I can't find other resources that substantiate this, but that doesn't mean it is invalid: <https://discover-the-truth.com/2013/09/14/bible-child-marriage-in-ancient-israelite-times-paedophilia/> I suspect that would be unusual, because who would want to wait nearly ten years to marry, unless they were of similar age. I think most of us would find that uncomfortable today.

I tend to view statistics cautiously. In fact, I tend to view them in much the same way as accuracy in impressionist art compares to a photograph – it gives a helpful impression, but nothing more.

The major set of data in this area is collated by The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL). This is the name given to a series of face-to-face surveys of people in the United Kingdom regarding their sexual behaviour and patterns.

There have been three surveys to date: NATSAL I (1990–91) and NATSAL II (2000-01) and NATSAL III (2010–12, with the fourth survey commencing in May 2019). However, extracting simplified data from this was

At what age did you lose your virginity?



Almost one in five (19%) of Britons lost their virginity before 16, the legal age of consent, but the average Briton is 18 when they lose their virginity. Current 16-24s are losing their virginites at a younger age (16.5) than any other age group did. Those living in London or the south-east tend to lose their virginity later (19) than in the rest of the country. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no clear gender difference in this respect.

unwieldy, and in my digging around I found that in September 2014, The Guardian published the British Sex Survey 2014. The chart is shown above, and the link is: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/28/british-sex-survey-2014-nation-lost-sexual-swagger>

Within a Christian context, we traditionally see sex as the gift of God, and it is also the symbol of the permanence of the relationship (such as marriage or similar life-long commitment). Hence, in my mind, the single Christian, whether straight or gay, ought to be *encouraged* to try to stay celibate until the relationship has been made permanent by marriage or some-such similar ceremony. Having said that, I recognise that nowadays, that standard is not possible for all, and proves very difficult for most, but for me, I'm far from convinced that a case can be made that the Christian Gay gets a free-pass to enjoy sex **without commitment**, at their choosing, where their straight brother and sister try to remain celibate till marriage. I don't see anything in Scripture to allow for this. I think the challenge for the future is to discuss this issue and then produce new clear teaching to describe when sex is acceptable, with clear reasoning, for both the straight and the gay. This is where the church completely fails now because it is largely against homosexuality, and therefore can hold to the traditional abstinence prior to commitment. Given that society sees no reason to be celibate prior to marriage, whether straight or gay, this is an issue we must face sooner or later, and I would argue we deal with it now, because the stable door is open, and the horse has just noticed! It may be that we reinforce celibacy for all, until there is commitment in the relationship, or we may decide the principles can be relaxed, although personally I'm not sure how Scripture can reinforce that position. Discuss!

– Chapter 4 –

The Responses of Church and Society to Sexuality

How do the Church and Society Respond to Issues of Sexuality? The quick answer – badly! But let's look at it with more detail. One of the problems with exploring the issues of Christianity and the LGBTQ+ person is that of finding resource material that is dispassionate, educated and Bible centric – from whichever side of the debate you come from. There is a lot of material out there which is simply one side shouting at the other with no attempt made to listen to the other perspective. Both sides clap their hands over their ears, so they can't hear what's being said and at the same time, shout their own views at anyone close enough to hear. This is not acceptable, or Godly. In my experience, non-affirming Christians seem to be the worst offenders. They feel threatened when their interpretation of the Bible is questioned, and, because so few have really looked at the issue, they cling to what they have been taught, claiming that only **they** are remaining faithful to God. Come Hell or high water they will cling on without questioning anything, because the Bible is "absolutely clear". The gay, lesbian and trans Christian are busy shouting back out of their hurt and rejection, sometimes resorting to shock tactics to try to get someone to listen, not realising that doesn't help their cause, but they are determined to be heard. Both sides need to be quiet and listen *and hear* one another, as well as moderating their language in the spirit of Jesus. Neither side can be proud of their behaviour, but I would blame non-affirming conservative Christians far more because they hold the position of power. For the time being they will always have numerical superiority, and, in the main, will have many years' experience of being an active Christian and of being part of church life, so know how to play the system. Quite frankly, in my view, they are disgraceful and should be behaving better rather than displaying the 'ungrace' – a word that Philip Yancey coined, in "What's so amazing about Grace?" (Brilliant book – read it!) Non-affirming Christians also claim to be the only ones who can hear what God is saying, because, they say, "The Bible says gays can't be Christians!" However, they seem unwilling to ask **why** the Bible seems to say that? They defend themselves by just shouting louder and repeating their accusations – a similar style to a certain President I can think of. They don't seem able to discuss the issues: Exactly what is the 'badness' the Bible is addressing? What is it trying to say? Does the Bible really say gays can't be Christians?

The problem of not digging into the meaning of texts is that it leaves your position very weak. The line seems to be something like this: if the text seems crystal clear, you can take it at face value, but if it's not clear, you need to do a bit of digging. This is very shallow, because we all look at text from the vantage of a 21st Century Western culture. Every passage can benefit from spending time exploring the meanings of words, so you get a better, more complete, understanding of what

God is saying. Many of us are familiar with the story of Jesus walking along the beach with Peter after Jesus' resurrection. We have been told how Jesus uses different words for love when asking Peter if he loved Him. The first two times are words deriving from 'Agape' and the third time a word deriving from 'Philiios'. You can do your own research to understand the deeper meaning of that conversation, but my point is that we can easily read and understand the English translation at face value, but by digging, we can understand so much more.

There's another instance. Jesus tells the story of salt that has lost its saltiness. For most of us living today we haven't a clue what Jesus was really saying. We are used to white grains that come out of a small dispenser. If they get wet, they dissolve and disappear, as we expect it to, so what's Jesus talking about when he says it can be thrown away and trodden on? No, it can't! Of course not! If you pour too much salt on a meal you might be able to scrape some of the sludge off, but you'd wash it down the sink, not throw it on a path for people to walk on – it'd disappear almost immediately. For that passage we need to understand the background of the day, before we understand His teaching. So, why do we not have the integrity to treat all of Scripture like that? Is it too inconvenient, too threatening? Perhaps my/our faith isn't strong enough to ask real questions.

There will be other stories of Jesus where knowledge of the customs and social background of His day will help us make sense of His teaching: a camel going through the eye of a needle; a woman who loses a coin and throws a party when she finds it! A party - must have been a nice coin! Again, you do the work to find the back-story.

I am presenting a huge amount of material to sift through, and you and I can keep finding new stuff. However, at some point you have to say that given what I have read so far, my view, on balance, is...well, whatever conclusion you yourself come to. Clearly as new material comes along, I may have to refine my thinking – at this stage the word must be 'refine', not 'revise', because I can't see any possible, valid, way back to my former non-affirming position. My own questions were raised because of the gay relationship of someone close to me and his partner of many years. I also have suspicions about others I think may be gay, but who have kept their orientation private, and may God bless them. Until roughly 2014 I had a fairly standard evangelical position which I thought perfectly correct, rational, considerate and Biblical: that God loves the sinner and hates the sin. And by extension if the person remained celibate, there would be no problem accepting folks into any church role or membership, but that it was unacceptable to be an actively gay Christian. This was the line I took when I discussed it with that person, although I have now had to apologise for the hurt and alienation from God I inadvertently caused. I deeply regret my words. That view was stupid and naïve.

One of the obvious flaws in the view that the celibate gay/lesbian can be involved in church life, is, what happens when perhaps 5/10 years down the line they fall in love with someone and decide they want to spend the rest of their life with them? Have they been dishonest or unfaithful? In a sense what have they done wrong? They have fallen in love! When you fell in love with your spouse/partner, could you stop it? God didn't make us to live in isolation – indeed He says in Genesis 2 "It is not good for the man to be alone."

As I say, this traditional argument of only accepting celibate gays/lesbians, is fundamentally flawed and ill thought-through as we'll see later. Questions grew in my mind when a church I was a part of, passed an amendment to its constitution to prevent the church ever being asked to marry gay people. The rhetoric at the church meeting was quite shocking, with each of the four speakers seemingly trying to outdo the previous one with their reference to gay people as abhorrent, sodomites, perverts, and abominations in the sight of God. I say this not because this church is worse than any other, it is probably very similar to many churches up and down this land. Given that we are frequently taught about God's **unconditional** love for humanity, it is strange how Christians frequently deny this teaching when talking about the LGBTQ+ community. They would object to this comment and strongly affirm that they "love the sinner, but hate the sin", but their verbal attitude says something different. It is an elitist attitude that says, "your sin is far more heinous than mine, because I've been forgiven, and you can never be - in my correct understanding of the Bible". In a while we'll look at just how wrong this thinking is, and the real meaning of 'unconditional'.

Looking back on that church occasion, I think the language would have made Jesus weep - that a people He loves could call another group of people He loves, an 'abomination', 'perverts' and 'sodomites' – regardless of whether being gay is okay, or wrong. It shows how little they understood their Bibles, because of the misuse of those words as we'll again see later, and because of the lack of love in their attitude. In subsequent conversations with people I respected who were there, they have no memory of the language used, and really don't recognise my description, which is fascinating. For one person, it changes their life, and for everyone else it was a complete non-event, with nothing out of the ordinary happening!

It is also sad that it takes Christians to show what hatred is like. It was that experience that left me extremely uncomfortable, and feeling I had to go away and really look at the issue. I did, to the extent I searched for and saved many scores of web pages to read later. In the end, I got busy doing other things and sadly this issue got pushed towards the back of the queue. Then another different LGBTQ+ situation crossed my path and I decided I really had to get the issue cleared up, so that I could have confidence in my view. So, for the first two months of 2015 I

devoted all my spare time to reading the pages I had previously downloaded and pondering how God's morality and Scripture, fitted this issue.

Looking back now to that meeting, in my view, I think these folks were foolish to use language like that in a church setting, when Jesus never showed anything but love to those who have been pushed to the edge of society, and he certainly didn't call anyone perverted. The harshest language Jesus used was directed at the religious establishment of the day – that would include myself, at the time, and the leaders and senior figures of any church. We think we can use strong language to protect God and the integrity of Scripture. Jesus' words should act as a warning and a caution to us.

We as Christians have a problem with how we use language: In June 2015 a "York Pride" march took place, starting on the steps of York Minster, and one of the Canons, Canon Michael Smith, addressed marchers saying:

"My name is Michael Smith and I am the Canon Pastor here at York Minster. Once again I am delighted, on behalf of the Dean and the Minster community, to be able to say a few words and to wish you well for your parade to the Knavesmire and for the rest of your day's activities and fun.

Our Mission statement here states that 'York Minster invites everyone to discover God's love through our welcome, worship, learning and work'. I would like to thank those who have organised this event for this invitation to speak which gives me the opportunity to tell you that our welcome at York Minster is completely and unreservedly inclusive.

Here at York Minster we are always open to having conversations with anyone who wants to come and talk with us and we are always ready to pray with and to pray for people at important times in their lives. Please do not hesitate to come and talk to us."

He also offered the following prayer:

"Loving God, we give thanks that the rainbow is a sign of your promise to love, care for and protect your creation and all your people. We pray for all who will share in this parade today and all who will watch it pass by. May all involved be reminded of your promise of love, care and protection, and of your big and generous heart where there is space for everyone. We offer our prayers and our thanksgivings in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen

Go on your way in peace. Grow in friendship with God, grow in friendship with your neighbours and follow the way of Jesus who reveals God's love for all people and the blessing of God almighty, the

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you, those you love and those you pray for today and always. Amen"

From <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/news-archive-2015/archbishop-yorks-statement-human-sexuality>

In response, one of the local Vicars Revd Melvin Tinker condemned Canon Michael for his decision to come out onto the steps of the Minster and bless the pride parade. In an article on the Premier web site, there is a report of Rev Tinker's comments:

"Would he say that serial adulterers should be welcome in the church?" the vicar asked. "Should he say that people engaged in paedophilia should be welcome in the church?"

"What he is basically saying is that in his opinion, this is a valid activity."

During an interview on 104.7 Minster FM the vicar was questioned if he was likening homosexuality to paedophilia.

"What I'm saying is that if the category - we are talking about moral categories here- and if homosexual general sex falls into the immoral category, then it is in the same category as any other immoral action," he replied.

The clergyman was challenged by the interviewer who said the blessing could be an attempt to show the Church was open to all types of people.

But he replied: "At one time homosexual activity was illegal, I don't think legality in the eyes of the law is anything to do with this. What we are talking about is whether certain actions are right or wrong in God's eyes, as he has revealed it in scripture, and also natural law as well.

"The tradition of scripture is that it isn't. The tradition of the church is that it isn't. The tradition of natural law is that it isn't.

"For the canon to flaunt these under the banner of equality is disingenuous.

"I am outraged that this should go on in the name of York Minster, in the name of Christianity, and in the name of the diocese.

"It really is just so provocative, and is incredibly insensitive, and a plain wrong thing to do at this time. I would have hoped that the Archbishop [John Sentamu] would have spoken out against this."

The story appeared here:

<https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/vicar-condemns-york-minster-gay-pride-blessing>

My complaint here is that I have no problem with the vicar disagreeing, saying that it contravenes his own understanding of the moral standards of Scripture, but to select two scripturally immoral issues like paedophilia and serial adultery is wildly inflammatory and does no-one any good. In this instance, no-one is discussing whether homosexuality is immoral in God's sight, because everyone has latched onto the vicar's implication that homosexuals are in the same category as paedophiles and serial adulterers, which is plainly stupid and downright wrong, as we will examine in detail later. There are plenty of other immoral issues he could also have picked on (such as surprisingly a man remarrying his former wife – condemned as immoral by Moses), but they wouldn't have made such big headlines, so it is clear he was after the headlines, however much offence it caused. So, where is the Grace of God in that?

The "can gay or lesbians have a place in a modern church?" issue is going to get more heated over the coming years as the Anglican Church tries to work out its position. Early in 2016 the Anglican Primates met in Canterbury because the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby wanted to stop a schism in the Anglican Communion. He was concerned it was about to break up over same sex marriage. I hope I'm wrong, but in my opinion, inevitably, one day, it will, but the report says:

"It ended with Anglican primates sanctioning the Episcopal Church of the United States of America because it permitted its clergy to perform gay marriages in July last year.

The punishment sees the Episcopal Church barred from full participation in the Anglican Communion for the next three years, meaning it cannot be involved in decision-making bodies.

The Anglican Communion said in a statement that the accepted [view] of gay marriage by the Episcopal Church represented a "fundamental departure" from the faith and teaching it held, which had caused "deep pain" to its members.

Bishop Michael Curry³, the leader of the American Episcopal Church, has said that the sanctioning will cause "real pain" to both Episcopalians in America and to gay people worldwide.

While non-affirming and affirming Christians have disagreed on the Anglican Communion's decision to punish the Episcopal Church, they have united on the fact that it should have been more outspoken against any individual or state persecution of gay and transgender people.

Sally Hitchiner, from the Diverse Church organisation, told Premier's News Hour: "I think everyone in the Anglican Church has a responsibility to speak out against violence against LGBT people, particularly in countries like Uganda that have got a history of it.

³ Bishop Curry preached at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018.

"All of our responsibility is to ensure that this statement [outlining the sanctioning] is not heard as justification for continuing that violence.

"I'm absolutely certain that it was not in the intention of the church leaders who made the decision to imply that, but it is used as justification by some homophobic and quite frankly quite nasty people to commit acts of torture and rape and violence against the LGBT community."

And Susie Leafe, from the non-affirming Reform group, told Premier's News Hour: "Obviously very encouraged that the overwhelming majority of the Primates voted in favour of keeping with the authority of Scripture when we're talking about deciding doctrine, and to uphold the Biblical view of marriage as between one man and one woman, faithful and lifelong.

"It's a shame it didn't also include some statement about reaching out in love to the LGBT community. It would've been good to have that as well."

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Conservatives-and-Liberals-agree-Anglican-Communion-must-speak-more-loudly-against-LGBT-persecution>

I was thrilled that both the Liberal and conservative wings of the church recognise that there should have been a stronger statement against the persecution and vilification of gay and transgender folk. I understand this was planned but got hijacked because the statement regarding the exclusion of the Episcopal church was leaked to the press early. The American Episcopal Church clearly aren't about to change their stance, so there is hurt on both sides, which will be Archbishop Justin's task to work to heal and renew relationships.

Where do we go from here? I guess we watch and wait. In my mind, it looks like the Anglican church will end up moving inexorably in two directions, separating like the Methodists did in the mid-18th century. Moving forward, Anglicanism, as well as those outside in other Christian churches, will get involved in a lot of heated froth and bubble on both sides, but I hope too, that both sides will learn to listen to the other, as I'm certain Archbishop Justin wants.

In February 2015 The Very Rev David Ison, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral wrote about this issue on the Accepting Evangelicals website. It was very well written and was a follow on from where the (Pilling) House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality Report got to in 2014 and asking, "Can different groups in the Church of England disagree but still live together?" The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has been calling for "good disagreement" on the issues of a rapidly changing culture around sexuality. The Bishop of Sheffield in a General Synod document in June 2014 commented:

There is no expectation of achieving any consensus – in either direction – in the foreseeable future. But there is a task to be done of encouraging those within the church who are at odds on this issue to express their concerns in a safe environment, listen carefully to those with whom they disagree profoundly, find something of Christ in each other and consider together what the practical consequence of disagreement might be.

The article can be read, in full, at: <http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/good-disagreement/david-ison-good-disagreement/> and I have to say I enjoyed reading it. This was because two issues I had already thought through and included in an earlier version of this document, were referred to in a serious paper, for the first time that I had read. It seemed to confirm that I was on the right track and asking the right questions.

Archbishop Justin really has his hands full, because whatever he says on the issue will be condemned by one group or another. The African church in particular, see him presiding over an apostate church that no longer preaches the Gospel. Interestingly, prior to colonisation, the views of tribal Africans towards those who today would identify as being part of the LGBTQ+ community, were very similar to those of the Native American Indians, and Aboriginal communities that we read about earlier. It was only with missionaries bringing religion, and with it, a Western cultural mindset in these areas, that attitudes changed. Although this is a long extract, I want you to realise that there are not just a couple of exceptions, but a very real validated tradition and history: <https://76crimes.com/2014/01/30/21-varieties-of-traditional-african-homosexuality/>:

In their work anthropologists Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe provide wide-ranging evidence in support of the fact that throughout Africa's history, homosexuality has been a "consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief systems."

Thabo Msibi of the University of Kwazulu-Natal documents many examples in Africa of same-sex desire being accommodated within pre-colonial rule."

The work of Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe is cited in the new report by Sexual Minorities Uganda on traditional forms of homosexuality in African cultures.

Deborah P. Amory speaks of "a long history of diverse African peoples engaging in same-sex relations."

Drawing on anthropological studies of the pre-colonial and colonial eras, it is possible to document a vast array of same-sex practises and diverse understandings of gender across the entire continent.

Examples include:

1. One notably "explicit" Bushmen painting, which depicts African men engaging in same-sex sexual activity.
2. In the late 1640s, a Dutch military attaché documented Nzinga, a warrior woman in the Ndongo kingdom of the Mbundu, who ruled as "king" rather than "queen", dressed as a man and surrounded herself with a harem of young men who dressed as women and who were her "wives".
3. Eighteenth century anthropologist, Father J-B. Labat, documented the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda, presiding priest of the Giagues, a group within the Congo kingdom, who routinely cross-dressed and was referred to as "grandmother".
4. In traditional, monarchical Zande culture, anthropological records described homosexuality as "indigenous". The Azande of the Northern Congo "routinely married" younger men who functioned as temporary wives – a practise that was institutionalised to such an extent that warriors would pay "brideprice" to the young man's parents.
5. Amongst Bantu-speaking Pouhain farmers (Bene, Bulu, Fang, Jaunde, Mokuk, Mwele, Ntum and Pangwe) in present-day Gabon and Cameroon, homosexual intercourse was known as bian nkû"ma– a medicine for wealth which was transmitted through sexual activity between men.
6. Similarly in Uganda, amongst the Nilotic Lango, men who assumed "alternative gender status" were known as mukodo dako. They were treated as women and were permitted to marry other men.
7. In the former Kingdom of Dahomey, women could be soldiers (above) and older women would sometimes marry younger women, according to anthropologist Melville Herkovits. Same-sex relationships were reported amongst other groups in Uganda, including the Bahima, ...
8. the Banyoro and ...
9. the Baganda. King Mwanga II, the Baganda monarch, was widely reported to have engaged in sexual relations with his male subjects.
10. A Jesuit working in Southern Africa in 1606 described finding "Chibadi, which are Men attired like Women, and behave themselves womanly, ashamed to be called men".
11. In the early 17th century in present-day Angola, Portuguese priests Gaspar Azevedo and Antonius Sequerius encountered men who spoke, sat and dressed like women, and who entered into marriage with men. Such marriages were "honored and even prized".
12. In the Iteso communities, based in northwest Kenya and Uganda, same-sex relations existed amongst men who behaved as and were socially accepted as women.
13. Same-sex practises were also recorded among the Banyoro and
14. ... the Langi.

15. In pre-colonial Benin, homosexuality was seen as a phase that boys passed through and grew out of.
16. There were practises of female-female marriages amongst the Nandi and ...
17. Kisii of Kenya, as well as ...
18. the Igbo of Nigeria,
19. the Nuer of Sudan and
20. the Kuria of Tanzania.
21. Among Cape Bantu, lesbianism was ascribed to women who were in the process of becoming chief diviners, known as isanuses.

Similar instances are quoted by Professor Carolyn Martin Shaw of UC Santa Cruz, in the History Channel programme, "The History Of Sex From Don Juan To Queen Victoria" (The episode aired 18 September 1999). She refers to people having intimate relationships, not with their spouse, but with friends. The programme also mentions instances where women of status and wealth - wives, and single women, could take wives of their own. These tended to be business or platonic relationships, but not often, a sexual relationship.

In another article on the website they refer to a report compiled by The Ugandan National Academy of Sciences, which looks at the situation in Africa, but in reality, could have been written about any country in the world.

African scientists: Homosexuality is natural and African

Posted on June 12, 2015 by Colin Stewart

South Africa's Mail & Guardian reports on a new Africa-based scientific report that discredits claims that homosexuality is unnatural and un-African. These are excerpts from that article:

The Ugandan National Academy of Sciences (Unas) has endorsed a report that says homosexuality and gender and sexual diversity are natural phenomena, which contradicts Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's stance that homosexuality is abnormal and should be outlawed. Unas and the Academy of Sciences of South Africa (Assaf) are the only academies of science in Africa to endorse the report. ...

The report, entitled Diversity in Human Sexuality: Implications for Policy in Africa and published by Assaf, was formulated by 13 experts to answer whether sexual diversity is unnatural and "unAfrican", if it can be "corrected", whether children are at risk from association with homosexuals and if there are benefits to outlawing same-sex sexual acts, among a number of other questions.

The report, based on the latest scientific evidence, found that:

- Gender identity (what gender a person identifies as), gender expression (how they demonstrate their gender), biological sex (which ranges from female sexual organs through intersex to male sexual organs) and sexual orientation (who a person is physically, spiritually and emotionally attracted to) is part of a continuum and that no positions on this spectrum are “unnatural”.
- There can be no justifications to “eliminate” lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons from society.
- Sociobehavioural research shows that people do not feel that they have a choice in their sexuality.
- Conservative estimates put global prevalence of people who identify as homosexual at 5%, with no evidence that this percentage is any lower in African countries. About 50-million people in Africa – just less than the population of South Africa – are estimated to be homosexual.
- Sexuality is not linked to the way parents bring up their children and sexual orientation cannot be “acquired” through the people with whom you associate.
- Tolerance of sexual orientation was found to positively impact societies’ public health, civil society and long-term economic growth, and repression was found to negatively affect the general population’s health.
- Repressive laws pertaining to sexual orientation cause major harm to public health systems and the population’s health through lack of access to healthcare for homosexuals, lack of information, particularly in the areas of HIV, TB and STI, and result in mental health problems for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals because of the stigma and repression that they experience.
- People are not homosexual because of childhood sexual abuse.
- Same-sex orientation cannot be changed through “reparative” or “conversion” therapy.

“We wanted a rational approach to this very irrational response [by African governments] to gender and sexual diversity,” Dr Glenda Gray told the Mail & Guardian ahead of the report’s release at the 7th South Africa Aids Conference in Durban [on June 10]. ...

“[The aim] was to unequivocally make the statement that gender and sexual diversity [are] a normal variant of life,” said Gray, who is the head of the Medical Research Council and on the consensus panel. “We realised that it has to come from Africa and African scientists have

to be involved in it, otherwise it will be rejected as something from the 'West'."

But the fact that this report originates in South Africa – despite the endorsement by Unas – means that it is likely to be ignored by politicians in Uganda, and possibly other policymakers on the continent. Dr Sylvia Tamale, a prominent academic and founder of the Law, Gender and Sexuality Research Project in Uganda, says: "I highly doubt that it will influence policymakers. The fact that it was developed by Assaf is also significant as it'll give policymakers the usual excuse to dismiss it as a report influenced by whites," Tamale says. ...

Despite the likelihood that this report will be rejected by Ugandan policymakers, Tamale says that although government media houses have a "standing blackout policy of not covering news on homosexuality", she expects other media houses in the country will pick up on the report.

<https://mg.co.za/article/2015-06-10-ugandan-academy-endorses-pro-gay-report>

I apologise for the long articles, but I'm trying to validate my point that we are not talking about hearsay, but true, factual evidence. We have looked at pre-Colonial peoples in the Americas and Africa, so what about Asia. Well, the pattern is true there as well. In September 2018, Gay sex was made legal in India, and in a report on the BBC website it was shown that in pre-Colonial days gender was significantly more fluid there as well. Read the article here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-46620242>.

There is a pattern here, that homosexuality is part of every tribe, country and culture, and that it is normal and natural. It is not a choice, but latent from birth, or probably more correctly, from conception. In theological terms it is part of the Imago Dei – the image of God.

These articles show that the position taken by the African Churches that homosexuality is un-African and unnatural, is very wrong, and the persecution of gay people cannot be justified. It doesn't matter whether you hold strong views about sexuality in Africa, or on the streets of London, verbal attacks on the LGBTQ+ community fly completely against everything we know of the character of Jesus.

In writing this essay, I am sad to say I'm ashamed of what people claiming to be fellow-Christians, have said and written. There are some terrible anti-gay comments out there. The "Trans Girl at the Cross" website (<http://www.chicagonow.com/trans-girl-cross/2012/07/being-transgender-is-not-a->

[choice/4](#)), talks about the hate directed at the LGBTQ+ community from the church, cites:

“Charles L. Worley of Maiden, North Carolina preached a sermon that went viral on YouTube. He preached that he thought gays should be fenced off from the rest of the population so they would “die off.” With rhetoric like this, how is any non-believer ever going to think that God, above all things, is a loving God? How is anyone going to think anything other than God is a God of punishment when he really came to die on the cross and forgive our sins?”⁵

Whichever side of the debate we are on, we must treat those with different views with honour and respect, even if we disagree profoundly. Another problem is that the established church has had a non-affirming view (similar to my own previous view expressed earlier), for many, many, years, so the church’s theologians will, by extension, be arguing from that standpoint, because that is their own background and training. However, in recent years some better-known Christian leaders have put their heads above the parapet with helpful contributions, and I would expect that trend to continue. Here I am thinking about Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Sojourners’ Jim Wallis, retired Christianity Today editor David Neff, Steve Chalke, and Tony Campolo. Talking about Tony Campolo, when I began this essay, his position was clearly nuanced because, as I understand it, had no problem with gays being church members, but drew a line where he wouldn’t want them in ministry. He retained a publicly non-affirming outlook but one that was a bit more open than most folks. However, since completing the first draft of this document, Tony Campolo changed his view, and I will quote his statement towards the end where it is more applicable. Suffice to say at present, Tony has now reached the position where he is “finally ready to call for the full acceptance of Christian gay couples into the Church”. This is a remarkable and exciting change from someone whose teaching I have loved since my teenaged years – 45+ years ago!

I also ought to add that maybe Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s views may have had to be formed in the fire of the fact that his daughter, Revd Canon Mpho Tutu-Van Firth, is gay. In May 2016 she had to give up ministry after entering a gay marriage having been married to a man previously.⁶ It’s important to recognise that it may be his views haven’t been affected by his family situation, but it may have focussed his thinking.

⁴ There are some problems with this site in Europe since the GDPR legislation, but you can view it if you use a VPN attached to a server in the US.

⁵ The sermon occurred on the 21st May 2012, and the YouTube clip is still available at the time I write this, but I don’t want to give the link as I believe the views are against the teachings of Jesus.

⁶ <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Desmond-Tutu-s-daughter-to-give-up-ministry-after-gay-marriage>.

In recent years, the Baptist Union (GB) has pulled back from its previously held line, and now allows each of its member churches to make up their own mind, so the Denomination no longer sees the issue as being black and white. Again, it's a slightly nuanced position, because the governance within Baptist circles is from the pews to the leaders, not from the leaders to the pews, so the Baptist Union can only ever be a loose association with each church having its own views on a number of issues but having a central common core belief. This means that two Baptist churches a mile apart can have widely divergent views but still be part of the Union. But the Union cannot speak for the members on anything other than a few issues. As I hold a Baptist theological position on most things, I would like to quote much more from this tradition, but as the Anglican church speaks from a much more public position, and represents greater numbers, I find myself using that material.

In collating material to explore my position, I have used whomever I determine is speaking words that follow Biblical teaching, or Biblical principles, whether the author is well known or not. There is a difficulty here, in that I will naturally be drawn only to those whose work is in line with my thinking. I accept that is largely true, but the non-affirming position is well-represented in many published works, and I'm looking at the affirming position which is less well represented and more disparate, so, in the main, that will be the area I will be focussing on. Moreover, this work is telling the story of why *I* changed **my** mind, so the choice of material **must** reflect that.

I will use the words of not just the well-known theologian, but also the words of those less well-known – those who are directly involved and trying to make sense of the situation in which they find themselves. However, keep in mind that the Bible wasn't written in English or even Latin, but in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, so some words simply may not have a 21st Century Western Civilisation/English equivalent. Most theologians I've read or listened to, bring their own backgrounds, prejudices, and culture to bear, in some form or another, which may not be particularly helpful, but we're all human and I bring my own baggage to this work. Having said that I will try to be as fair as possible to the non-affirming position. As a result, sifting the wheat from the chaff is sometimes exceedingly difficult, but this is what we are called to do – and you must do that with what I've written as well. As a good friend commented: *"The uncomfortable reality here is that two honest and believing Christians who hold opposing views can approach the scripture with relatively open minds and both find support for their opposing views. This is the deep ambiguity of scripture especially when taken out of context"*.

Clearly, the issues are incredibly complex, but that doesn't mean we give up, or look for an easy way out. Paul writes in Philippians 2: 12: - "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,**" I

therefore have to work my way through this, convinced I am now on the right path, but with the fear I could be wrong, and the hope that I honour God with the attitude I take.

Another issue I regularly hear, is the perception that anyone who questions the traditional view of sexuality is someone who has gone soft, and is now just following the way of the world, having embraced the spirit of the age, and has thrown out the Bible. (I heard a minister from the West of Scotland say this about Steve Chalke.) This is quite hurtful, because any view I take, must be firmly anchored in Scripture and scriptural principles, and if the journey takes me in a different direction to others, that is sad, but I have to honour where God leads. Certainly, I would utterly refute the idea that I simply fall in line with current societal trends – that would be unChrist-like because in Romans 12: 2 we read: - “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will”.

There is one more utterly key issue I want to deal with at the beginning: are folk born trans or gay/lesbian? The way this question is answered goes a long way to forming your theology. If you believe the answer is “No”, and you can prove it from science, then it’s easy to make the case that all this LGBTQ+ sexuality stuff is a sin needing repentance and a change of heart. However, if folk are truly born with these conditions, albeit latently, whether they reveal themselves at puberty, or earlier, or later, we must work out a theology that includes them, but one that is also totally consistent with Scripture. If the Bible said that everyone with blue eyes or curly hair was to be condemned, you’d want to ask, and understand, why, since they have no choice. Even buying hair -straighteners only treats the symptoms, not the condition!

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has gone on record saying: *“We struggled against apartheid because we were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about. It is the same with homosexuality. The orientation is a given, not a matter of choice. It would be crazy for someone to choose to be gay, given the homophobia that is present”*. And don’t forget the church, in the form of the Dutch Reformed Church was a huge advocate of apartheid, and how evil was that?

When David Bowie died, Tom Robinson (writer and singer of “Glad to be Gay” credited him with making it possible to be happy and gay. Whilst that doesn't seem that big a comment, we need to turn that the other way around to realise that at the time the song was written in the mid '70's, if you were gay, you were effectively condemned to a life of unhappiness. Do we seriously think folk choose to be gay? Can I choose the place of my birth, or what medical needs I might have? No, neither can someone choose to be gay – they just are.

Let's have a look at that song and feel the hurt of the experience:

The British Police are the best in the world
I don't believe one of these stories I've heard
'Bout them raiding our pubs for no reason at all
Lining the customers up by the wall
Picking out people and knocking them down
Resisting arrest as they're kicked on the ground
Searching their houses and calling them queer
I don't believe that sort of thing happens here

Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way
Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way

Pictures of naked young women are fun
In Titbits and Playboy, page three of The Sun
There's no nudes in Gay News our one magazine
But they still find excuses to call it obscene
Read how disgusting we are in the press
Telegraph, People and Sunday Express
Molesters of children, corruptors of youth
It's there in the paper, it must be the truth

Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way
Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way

Don't try to kid us that if you're discreet
You're perfectly safe as you walk down the street
You don't have to mince or make bitchy remarks
To get beaten unconscious and left in the dark
I had a friend who was gentle and short
He was lonely one evening and went for a walk
Queer-bashers caught him and kicked in his teeth
He was only hospitalised for a week

Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way
Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way

So sit back and watch as they close all our clubs
Arrest us for meeting and raid all our pubs
Make sure your boyfriend's at least 21
So only your friends and your brothers get done
Lie to your workmates, lie to your folks
Put down the queens and tell anti-queer jokes
Gay Lib's ridiculous, join their laughter
'The buggers are legal now, what more are they after?'

Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way
Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way

Songwriters: TOM ROBINSON
Glad To Be Gay lyrics © CONEXION MEDIA GROUP, INC.

You can hear the hurt and injustice in those words, and most of us at the time the song came out didn't let the words of the song get anywhere near our consciousness – we just enjoyed the song.

Again, I must ask: is being LGBTQ+ a choice? Only if you are a prejudiced Christian it seems. It sounds stark and possibly a little offensive written like that, but have you looked at the origins of the word prejudice? Prejudice comes from Middle English, and derives from the Latin *praejudicium*, made up of *prae* 'in advance' and *judicium* 'judgement'. Or pre-judging. Any comments made without knowledge of, or investigation of, any issue, are pre-judged, or prejudice. In my personal experience, very few non-affirming Christians have ever investigated the issue at any depth, and most who have looked, have only looked at it superficially. It's not through any malice, but purely that they are not that interested, because it's an issue that affects others not themselves or their families. I would have been in that camp until a few years ago, until I was forced to evaluate what I thought. The main argument used by non-affirming Christians is that homosexuality is 'unnatural'. That's a silly argument, because anyone using it simply hasn't done any homework, and their comment highlights this. 'Unnatural' cannot be used in the context that it is not natural to humanity, because it is – the evidence is there for all to see. Homosexuality occurs naturally.

Current medical understanding has almost without exception recognised there is usually a biological/physiological reason for being LGBTQ+. You can do your own search because there's a lot of stuff out there! The Wikipedia entry is thorough – possibly a bit mind-boggling for the lay-person but contains a lot of scientifically attributed info. We must also consider a lot of circumstantial evidence as well:

- Those who think homosexuality only occurs amongst humans are wrong. I'm sorry but it is that plain and simple. Homosexuality occurs naturally in much of nature. Again, take a look at Wikipedia to get the citations, but it is indicated that "As of 1999, nearly 1,500 species, ranging from primates to gut worms, have been observed engaging in same-sex behaviours; this is well documented in about 500 species."⁷

⁷ Bagemihl B (1999). *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (Stone Wall Inn ed.). New York City: St. Martin's Press. ISBN 9780312253776

- There is another helpful article published here: <http://www.versiondaily.com/homosexual-behaviours-in-other-animals/>. Wikipedia provides a page with a list of animals, from the giraffe to the domestic sheep, birds, reptiles, insects, etc. – all displaying homosexual behaviour: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_animals_displaying_homosexual_behavior (Speaking personally, I have observed it a couple of times, when watching pigeons! Probably more accurately, the pigeons I noticed were more likely displaying bisexual behaviour. Certainly, one pigeon was assertive in one instance and submissive in the next. But my observations have noted this on more than one occasion. But you can do your own monitoring and make up your own mind.)
As an example, at the Sea Life Sydney Aquarium in October 2018 a same-sex gentoo penguin couple were given an egg to incubate, which they succeeded in hatching. Tish Hannan, the supervisor of the aquarium’s penguin department, told ABC that:

gentoo penguins have a “strong urge to be parents” regardless of gender and that same-sex coupling within the species is not uncommon.

Yet, male-male couples rarely get the opportunity to be parents.

“With female-female pairs, what will happen is those females will actually go off and mate with males and come back and lay eggs and both females will raise the chicks,” she said. “With the two males, sometimes they’ll try and steal eggs that are unoccupied, so it can happen but it’s not very likely.”

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/same-sex-penguin-couple-welcomed-their-first-baby_us_5bd34dbce4b055bc948b8cad

- Again, looking at the natural world we can see things go wrong not just genetically but embryonically. So, when cells from twins’ fuse in the early stages, they become one chimæric individual. If the embryo was a bird, you could have different coloured plumage on both sides of the body, but where the twins would have been near identical, you may not be able to tell. However, if one twin would have been male and the other female, you could have both genders in the resulting new life-form (whether bird, animal or human). If you inhabit the Twittersphere, looking at pictures of cats,
 - a) get a life(!);
 - b) you will be familiar with the scores of pictures of chimæric cats, where there is a straight line down their body, and one side may be one colour like pure black and the other side completely different, say a patterned ginger or

white. For a fuller exploration of this, including pictures, take a look at <https://medium.com/@GrrlScientist/31jan2014-half-siders-a-tale-of-two-birdies-grrlscientist-4e7b5b9cfff>.

- Tens of thousands of men were prosecuted for 'gross indecency' or homosexuality between 1885 and 1967. In addition, many were forced to undergo chemical castration. If it were a situation that being gay, or lesbian were simply a choice, when the state forces arrive at your door, wouldn't you just make the choice to go back to being straight? Why face persecution and actual physical harm unless this were at the core of your being? This was wonderfully portrayed in the film "The Imitation Game," the story of the life of Alan Turing who created the machine that broke the German 'Enigma' code machine. Here was a man who shortened the war by 2 years, saving hundreds of thousands of lives. Yet he was convicted for gross indecency (being gay), opting for chemical castration, and ended up taking his own life because he couldn't cope. This man should have statues erected in his memory, and yet he was treated disgracefully by the Government of the day (with the church quietly holding the cloaks of the MP's in the background – Acts 7: 58).

Here was a man who even today is having an impact. In late 2018 Edinburgh University researchers considered that the methods he developed to break the Enigma machine, might be useful in determining approaches that should make it easier to decide when a new diagnostic test should be used in the early detection of cancer, and other diseases.

<https://news.stv.tv/archive/1432292-codebreaker-s-work-could-improve-cancer-detection-tests> So even more lives might be extended and saved.

- In the chapter called 'One Last Year of Silence' from his book, "A Stranger At The Gate – To Be Gay And Christian In America", Rev Dr Mel White writes about the treatment gays and lesbians have received through the 20th Century. He includes the disgraceful campaigns of the Moral Majority and religious right, including many of the TV evangelists. Today they have spawned the Evangelical Right who have given us perhaps the worst US President in history. He also describes the campaigns run by Hitler's Nazi party, later to be used as the play-book of the religious right, and goes on to describe their treatment of gay men where he writes:

In 1935, Nazi law banned all gay gathering places and outlawed homosexuals as "sexual vagrants." By 1936, the annual number of gay men arrested and imprisoned exceeded four thousand. In 1938 alone, more than eight thousand German gay men (or suspected gay men) fell victim to Paragraph 175. Before the Third Reich ended, more than fifty thousand gay men were convicted on charges of "sexual deviation"; more than half of them were arrested between 1937 and

1939, those years when Hitler needed an easy target to gain support and mobilize his power.

Once gay (or suspected gay) Germans had served their prison terms under Paragraph 175, Himmler had them thrown into concentration camps where they were used as slaves or summarily shot. "That wasn't a punishment," Himmler claimed, "but simply the extinguishing of abnormal life. It had to be got rid of, just as we pull out weeds, throw them on a heap, and bum them." When Allied armies liberated Nazi concentration camps they freed Jews, other ethnic minorities, gypsies and most political prisoners. But they kept the gays in prison. In fact, Paragraph 175 was not repealed in Germany until 1968. [A Stranger At The Gate – To Be Gay And Christian In America. Page 232]

A helpful film to watch would be the 1992 Martin Sherman film "Bent". The story of a gay man called Max who is caught by the Gestapo but denies he is gay. He accepts the yellow star of being Jewish after watching his gay lover being cruelly tortured and killed while they are both on the train to Dachau. He denies any relationship to his gay lover to preserve his own life. In the prison camp he works with an openly gay male nurse and they fall in love. Rudy, the male nurse, demonstrates the strength and pride of wearing the pink triangle denoting that he is gay, and this presents a challenge to Max. To avoid spoilers, I won't say how Max comes to embrace his reality, but it depicts some of the cruelty of the Nazi's towards gays of the period.

So, choosing to be a gay or lesbian ...? Really? I therefore truly believe that it is disgracefully disingenuous to say people 'choose' to be gay or lesbian, simply to prop up a weak theological position.

- Neither you nor I wondered when growing up "What shall I be? Shall I be straight or gay/lesbian?" No, we became what we always had been – nature took its course. How can that be a sin? I accept many gay folks feel/felt peer pressure to date people of the opposite sex, and maybe the societal pressures they felt meant the relationships developed to a degree, and some folks managed to keep a marriage together – but they are rare. Besides, many tried to be straight because they didn't want to be different and were feeling a sense of guilt for their feelings, for which they could do nothing. But so many finally end up saying "I was always gay." In my limited conversations with (and more extensive reading of articles about) LGBTQ+ folk there has frequently been a sense that they grew up feeling a sense of guilt for being different, and this guilt they often face before coming to terms with their situation, is a good indicator that being LGBTQ+ is not a choice but an unalterable orientation. Let me give you an illustration. The

Welsh rugby World Cup referee Nigel Owens appeared on Desert Island Discs in early February 2017, and in a promo piece on the BBC website before the broadcast, it reported:

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs, he said:
"Refereeing that World Cup final between Australia and New Zealand in front of 85,000 people and the millions of people watching at home, scrutinising every single decision you make under a huge amount of pressure, was nothing compared to the challenge of accepting who I was."

Owens, 45, said he "would have done anything to be 'normal' in people's eyes".

The referee, who grew up in a village in Carmarthenshire, Wales, developed bulimia and later became hooked on steroids when he started going to the gym.

He described how he went to a doctor and said: "I do not want to be gay. Can I get chemically castrated?"

Owen said he has received huge support from the Welsh Rugby Union and feels he has been given a "second chance".

He went on to say: "Unless you are happy within who you are, you cannot excel and be the best you can be at whatever you are doing. You cannot enjoy life if you are not happy within yourself."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38871025>

In the broadcast, Nigel revealed that he was about 19 when he realised he was being attracted to men, which was alien to him because he knew no other gay men, and his only experience was seeing camp characters on TV shows, like "Are You Being Served".

He went on to describe how he had attempted to take his own life when he was 25 years old - fortunately failing. Since he was working on a farm at the time, he went out into the fields above the family home, taking a bottle of whiskey, some paracetamol, and a shotgun. He overdosed on the Paracetamol and whiskey, slipping into a coma, and it was this that prevented him from using the shotgun – although if he hadn't been found for another half hour he wouldn't be here today anyway.

Nigel's story does not sound like that of someone who has a choice does it? Attempted suicide. Wanting to be castrated. Sadly, it isn't a one-off – it's the same story you hear from many LGBTQ+ folk at some point: "I don't

want to be different; I want to be normal". You will know this yourself, if you've quietly spoken to anyone in the community or read articles by them.

- Growing up as a gay person is a far from easy experience. On 18th April 2019 Lyra McKee, 29, was struck by a stray bullet and killed as she was observing the violence in Londonderry. She had written a letter to her 14-yr old gay self, saying:

It's going to be okay.

I know you're not feeling that way right now. You're sitting in school. The other kids are making fun of you. You told the wrong person you had a crush and soon, they all knew your secret. It's horrible. They make your life hell. They laugh at you, whisper about you and call you names. It's not nice. And you can't ask an adult for help because if you did that, you'd have to tell them the truth and you can't do that. They can't ever know your secret. ...

... Three months before your 21st birthday, you will tell Mum the secret. You will be sobbing and shaking and she will be frightened because she doesn't know what's wrong. Christmas will be just a couple of weeks away. You have to tell her because you've met someone you like and you can't live with the guilt anymore. You can't get the words out so she says it: "Are you gay?" And you will say, "Yes Mummy, I'm so sorry." And instead of getting mad, she will reply "Thank God you're not pregnant".

You will crawl into her lap, sobbing, as she holds you and tells you that you are her little girl and how could you ever think that anything would make her love you any less? You will feel like a prisoner who has been given their freedom. You will remember all the times you pleaded with God to help you because you were so afraid and you will feel so foolish because you had nothing to worry about.

<http://www.thepensivequill.com/2014/08/letter-to-my-14-year-old-self.html?m=0>

- If choice were really involved, logically the mental health of LGBTQ+ folk should be no different to the rest of society, because they were choosing their lifestyle and living it out – so there would be an element of contentment. Yet study after study tells us that these wonderful people frequently suffer from mental health issues. Why? Don't put the cart before the horse and surmise that they are LGBTQ+ because of their mental health issue. I've heard folk say that, and it's very wrong. The story that follows

(along with many others in this piece) illustrates why mental health problems beset this community. BBC Newsbeat ran this story in November 2018 making the point that Stonewall had reported that 52% of the LGBTQ+ community have suffered with depression in the last year. They went on to quote the story of Bree:

Bree, who's 19 and lives in London, says she's struggled with her mental health because of her experiences as a young gay teen.

"When I was at school, I was always the butt of the gay jokes and it made me feel ill," she tells Radio 1 Newsbeat. "I guess you'd say I'm your stereotypical lesbian. So at school I was always called names at every opportunity they had."

When she realised she was gay at 13, Bree says she was "terrified" her friends would find out because of their homophobia towards LGBT people.

"It's really depressing to realise that everyone around you thinks that you're disgusting and you can't actually do anything to change it."

Bree says she's now "comfortable" with herself and her sexuality, but even now says she suffers from anxiety when she is in public with her girlfriend.

"On the depression side of things, things are a lot better now, but you still do get that anxiety when you go out and you feel like you could be outed," she says.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-46140985>

Everyone knows that living permanently with stress is very bad for your health and can shorten life, and it is this that lies at the root of many people's problems. How awful must it be to live your life thinking "that you're disgusting and you can't actually do anything to change it"? How much strain does that put on someone? Please read Vicky Beeching's book "Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free From Shame" if you haven't already. It illustrates the life-changing devastation that can be caused by the unremitting stress of trying to match people's expectations within the Christian community. I view it as compulsory reading.

- In a further Newsbeat article at the end of July 2019, they reported that:

... one in four young homeless people identify as LGBT: "Our research suggests that 77% of those cite familial rejection or

abuse as the main cause, and 45% of those identify with a faith background".

The Trust [the Albert Kennedy Trust] says the majority are from Muslim and Christian families.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-49150753>

What do these Christian families think they are doing making their children homeless? This isn't demonstrating the example of Jesus for their children to follow. Homelessness contributes massively to stress and mental health.

- Even today, in many parts of the world, LGBTQ+ men and women are imprisoned for their sexuality. There are still 14 states in the US⁸ with anti-sodomy laws. Prisons should be the place to keep people who endanger others. In the main, LGBTQ+ folk care deeply for their partners and are no more a threat to anyone, than you or I – and hopefully you are no threat! Obviously if a gay person sexually attacked another person, the full weight of the law applies to them in the same way as it does to a rapist – and how many rapists do we have? Does one gay person who sexually attacks someone else, mean that all gay people are predators? Of course not! To make a point, maybe we should treat with suspicion every straight person, because they could be a potential rapist. Clearly that's stupid, so let's use proper information and be fair.

Let's take a momentary sidestep. We have already used the term 'spectrum' a few times, but I want you to realise that everything in life is a spectrum. There is nothing binary in the human body. There will be a range of conditions – some good and some bad, and I challenge you to think of a single aspect that is binary. On the next page I have included a table I compiled to try and illustrate that our bodies are a spectrum. It has weaknesses, and I'm certain it can be improved a lot, but that might be something you can do!

I don't want to be misleading, in each category there is a majority or typical group, and the exceptions at either end will be small, but almost everyone will have something they don't like about themselves, or something that is a nuisance.

⁸ In the United States, anti-sodomy laws were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003, but they are still on the books in 14 states: Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah and Virginia. Conservative state legislators still refuse to repeal the laws.

<http://76crimes.com/2013/08/14/13-states-in-u-s-like-76-plus-countries-hold-onto-anti-gay-laws/>

Note the spectrum for all these conditions.					
Eyesight - a spectrum of conditions.	None/Blind	Visual impairment	Other minor defects, incl. long/short sight.	Good	Excellent
examples:	Assistance needed		Any normal job, sport or activity		Diamond sorter, Pilot, Olympic archer/shooter.
Lungs - a spectrum of conditions.	Range of severe conditions	Cystic fibrosis	Asthma - severe to mild	Normal	Capacity above 6ltrs.
examples:	Range of medical help needed to control/treat conditions and keep a person alive.			Men: 6ltr Women: 4.8ltr	Olympic Athlete: Sir Steve Redgrave - 8.5ltr; Michael Phelps - 12ltr
Arms - a spectrum of conditions.	Missing or malformed		Undergrowth	Average range	Overgrowth
examples:	Caused by teratogens incl. drug thalidomide (1950's-60's) Need for prosthetics		Probably a good deal of support needed.	Normally span is similar to height, but can still vary a lot.	Helps with sports like swimming and basketball; Michael Phelps span 6ft 7in
Legs - a spectrum of conditions.	Missing or malformed		Undergrowth	Average range	Overgrowth
examples:	Caused by teratogens incl. drug thalidomide (1950's-60's) Need for prosthetics		Probably a good deal of support needed.	Average leg length? I guess view differing trouser lengths, but unusually long or short can be measured by the difficulty in buying clothes!	Helps with sports like sprinting and basketball; Usain Bolt
Height - a spectrum of conditions.		Dwarfism	Short of stature	Average	Tall to Giantism
examples:		Good opportunities in Acting: Peter Dinklage (Game of Thrones) and Warwick Davis (Harry Potter and Star Wars)		Most buildings and vehicles (doors, rooms cab height) are built for a person of average height.	Helps with sports like basketball and sprinting. Tallest Basketball player: Gheorghe Mureşan - 7ft 7in
Brains - a huge spectrum of conditions. - One aspect only: Autism	Kanner or severe Autism	Varying conditions and severity		Asperger's Syndrome	Autistic Savantism
examples:	intellectual retardation and language disorders	Wide range of characteristics, behavioral, learning, developmental, social, with a difficulty in making and maintaining relationships		Some can be highly intelligent but with inadequate social skills, others struggle with day-to-day issues. May have heightened senses.	Where a person can have an outstanding skill with numbers, music and art without needing to practice - a Prodigy.
<p>Brains - you could look at a whole slew of differences: learn at different rates, information retention, sensitivity to situations and other people, capacity to handle pain, ability to concentrate, communication and language skills, anger responses, artistic expression - music, dance, art, sculpture; capacity for patience. In every category you can have a spectrum of responses even with the neuro-typical - "every person is different" as we say.</p>					
<p>Sex and Gender: "Gender identity (what gender a person identifies as), gender expression (how they demonstrate their gender), biological sex (which ranges from female sexual organs through intersex to male sexual organs) and sexual orientation (who a person is physically, spiritually and emotionally attracted to) is part of a continuum and that no positions on this spectrum are "unnatural" - https://76crimes.com/2015/06/12/african-scientists-homosexuality-is-natural-and-african/. At this point many Christians argue that we suddenly move to a binary system where only two identities are possible, Male or Female, with biological sex determining everything else. Somehow, although everything else that makes us human is in a spectrum, sex and gender have been totally untouched by 'the Fall' and remain binary, assuming you accept the Fall as valid. Rather inconsistently and strangely, they accept intersex conditions, but won't consider anything else. In a binary setup, how does intersex occur, and if it does, why not other conditions? There's a failure to engage intelligently, because I'm sure you'll agree by now, we really do have a spectrum, but it certainly cannot be:</p>					
Male	⇒	(Intersex?)	⇐	Female	

So why is it so hard to consider LGBTQ+ conditions as normal and to be expected. In addition, many characteristics are desirable, and not seen as negative, so longer arms may be a problem buying shirts, but if your sport is Basketball or swimming, you'll be glad. It is only that society, and the church, have a subjective bias against the community. In the table I am trying to show how wrong-headed and illogical

the idea that gender is binary, whereas everything else can be part of a spectrum. My argument is that if Scripture seems to run counter to the observable Human Condition, we don't stick our heads in the sand and just robotically say "the Bible says..." but we go back to Theology and ask whether we have understood it correctly – in line with my earlier argument about the conflicts with the character of God on page 12.

We are often tempted to think that someone with a condition is ill, incomplete or defective. That is wrong, and indeed runs counter to the way Jesus values everyone, especially those that society dismisses. Consider the exceptional and genius talent of Stephen Hawking despite having Motor Neurone Disease. No condition precludes a person from being able to make a huge contribution to their world, and in my experience people within the LGBTQ+ community frequently out-perform the rest of us. That may be because they feel they must try harder to be accepted, whereas the rest of us are lazy. Neither position is good in God's sight. Theologically, being LGBT+ is a gift from God, and needs to be treasured and affirmed by all.

In that table on the previous page, I mention Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which is an interesting range of conditions that include things like Asperger's Syndrome. At one end of the scale you can have savants where "a person with a mental disability demonstrates profound and prodigious capacities or abilities far in excess of what would be considered normal" (Wikipedia). At the other end, you have Kanner or severe/classic autism which can be debilitating – such as intellectual retardation and language disorders.

First of all, let's be clear and say there is absolutely no link between Autism/Tourette's and the LGBTQ+ orientations, I am going somewhere else with this.

Before I make my point, the latest statistics I came across, compiled on behalf of the 2018 Channel 4 programme, "Are You Autistic?", suggests that one percent of the population may have autism, and unlike previous studies the number of girls and women with the condition are not far behind the male statistics. Prior to broadcast they conducted a survey. Of 750,000 respondents (a huge number in survey terms), 87,000 had results that might indicate they could be autistic. As the programme details indicated:

In a one-hour special for Channel 4, Anna Richardson and campaigners Georgia Harper and Sam Ahern, who both have autism, set out to uncover the true face of autism in the UK today. Working closely with charities, experts, and people with autism from across the spectrum, the [show challenged] what we think we know about autism.

Anna's family is one of those living with autism as her nephew has been recently diagnosed.

Trainee human rights lawyer Georgia and artist Sam want to smash apart the myths about the condition and show what people with autism are really like. "Autistic people aren't broken or weird or anything to be scared of. We're just ordinary people like you. Our brains are just wired a bit differently that's all."

<http://metro.co.uk/2018/03/28/a-new-channel-4-documentary-asks-are-you-autistic-we-speak-to-the-participants-7409006/>

That's a fascinating concluding remark about brains being wired differently to those of us who may be neuro typical. I would suggest that those who have an experience of living or working with someone who is on the Autism Spectrum, will completely get the concept that these folk are wired differently, and will therefore have no problem at all accepting that those in the LGBTQ+ community also have brains that are wired differently to the Gender Normative. I suspect they already accept the LGBTQ+ community, but I must find a theological understanding to bolster it.

Getting back to my point, I want to highlight the fact that folks on the Autism spectrum are treated as being who, and what they are. No-one tries to transform them, and Christians don't seek to "heal" them, or make a special effort to get them to repent when they have done something wrong. Of course, in the case of those unable to function on their own, their carers will seek to communicate that certain behaviour is acceptable, and other behaviour is not, but at the end of the day, when someone has a meltdown, the carers pick up the pieces and move from wherever they now find themselves. I express it that way because normally when a meltdown occurs it can be dramatic not just in its rage, but also its violence against people and property, and the sufferer just cannot help it. At that moment in time, they no longer see people as people – everything that happens to be in the way is a potential target of their pent-up frustration.

You could also draw attention to someone suffering with Tourette's Syndrome. People with this syndrome tend to have a number of motor or phonic tics. Motor tics are sudden, repetitive, non-rhythmic movements; and phonic tics are involuntary sounds produced by moving air through the nose, mouth, or throat, and many will associate bursts of swearing/expletives. Once again, if someone with Tourette's accept Christ as Saviour, they'll be welcomed by the church and a blind eye turned to any 'sentence enhancers' (as I understand Spongebob calls it) used. The bad language will be called sin by many folks, but the same folks will not expect any real behaviour change, because they recognise the behaviour is just a part of the person that is unlikely to change. When God eventually calls them home, do they believe the person will be saved, despite their ongoing perhaps

unacceptable, behaviour traits? Of course, they do! Do I have to suggest we have an inconsistency problem here?

Tourette's isn't too common (.6-1% of the total adult population – according to various studies - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourette_syndrome), but nevertheless it would not be uncommon to find someone in a church with this condition. Statistically there will be one or more folks with an autism-related condition in many churches.

To this you could add Down's Syndrome and others; and I doubt whether many sufferers of any of these conditions have been brought for healing more than once, if that. Jesus has the power to heal, of course, but usually his purpose is something else – maybe to help those involved develop in ways they wouldn't have done without that bit of grit in the oyster. That could be seen as a bit rough on the sufferer, but you take it up with God sometime later. In most churches, people will say about folks with Asperger/Tourette's, "that's just who they are, they can't help it/they don't mean it," and we all move on and it's back under the carpet. An interesting illustration of this is Archbishop Justin Welby, who commented that he doesn't pray for his daughter Eleanor's healing from dyspraxia:

Speaking on BBC's Ouch podcast with his daughters Katharine and Ellie, Most Rev Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury said: "I haven't prayed for Ellie.

"I haven't talked to Ellie about this [but] we had this discussion once around the [family] table when Ellie wasn't there, because someone had asked me the question".

Turning to Ellie, he said: "Your younger sister said, 'If God changed Ellie she wouldn't be Ellie, and we love Ellie'. So, there's that thing that Ellie's Ellie, she's precious."

Ellie added: "I have felt a bit like, well, if God heals, why am I still dyspraxic? Why do I still find it really difficult to do things? But at the same time, it doesn't change the way I trust God".

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Justin-Welby-says-he-doesn-t-pray-for-healing-for-daughter-s-disability>

To that you can add those who may not be savants but are nonetheless exceptionally gifted and/or precocious. Frequently, they struggle to fit into peer groups at school, or at the pub when older, because no-one likes a smart Alec who knows everything. Do we pray that their abilities will be reduced so they fit in better? Not a chance! The parent with an extraordinarily gifted child takes huge pride in the child, although they will have concerns about some aspects of their child's life. The parent with a Down's Syndrome or alternatively, an ASD child, have huge difficulties to deal with, and can't help but lavish love on the child, probably to a greater extent than a "normal" (whatever that is!) child. In May 2017, a father

was interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live about how difficult life had been for his family with two ASD boys. He described the difficulties of their growing up, and on through the teenaged years, and broke down in tears at the pride he now had in what his older (22yr old) had achieved.

I have never heard stories of Christians coming forward to request healing for their exceptionally gifted and intelligent child, but then maybe I haven't been in the right place, at the right time!

It seems that we have either a personal or cultural expectation of what we find acceptable, and those things we don't find acceptable, we set ourselves and our prejudices against, and defend our attitude to the hilt. So, ASD, Tourette's, Down's and the super-gifted, are all acceptable, although they all cause problems within families, and clearly stuff has developed away from the norm, but apparently being LGBTQ+ is not acceptable, even though the development process was the same, it's just that the outworking and nature of the condition is slower at being revealed.

So why can't we be as equally fair to other folks born with a latent orientation we don't find acceptable, and is different from perhaps our own?

Don't forget Jesus' words: *Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* - Matthew 19: 14

There are perhaps a couple of questions I need to look at before starting the main issues to be addressed in the essay. I think we need to look at the questions of what determines gender, and what makes God male?

The man/woman in the street would say that the difference between a man and a woman is determined by the presence of a penis or vagina/breasts, however it isn't that simple. Scientists would say that a female has two X chromosomes and a male has one X and one Y chromosome. That sounds pretty simple, but actually it is incredibly complex! Every human cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, for a total of 46 chromosomes including an XY or XX chromosomes. A chromosome contains hundreds or thousands of genes – for example chromosome 1 has over 2000 genes; chromosome 22 has 5-600; the X chromosome has 8-900 and the Y chromosome has 50-60. A gene is a segment of DNA containing the code used to synthesize a protein. You can look up more information here:

<https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/chromosome>

For those with a mathematical interest, I have included a table of the human genome – it is only here for completeness, so just skip over it. (Although the confirmed number of proteins is shown as 19,313 the total is thought to be between 20-25,000 – probably nearer the former.):

Chromosome	Length (mm)	Base pairs	Variations	Confirmed proteins	Putative proteins	Pseudogenes	miRNA	rRNA	snRNA	snoRNA	Misc ncRNA
1	85	249,250,621	4,401,091	2,012	31	1,130	134	66	221	145	106
2	83	243,199,373	4,607,702	1,203	50	948	115	40	161	117	93
3	67	198,022,430	3,894,345	1,040	25	719	99	29	138	87	77
4	65	191,154,276	3,673,892	718	39	698	92	24	120	56	71
5	62	180,915,260	3,436,667	849	24	676	83	25	106	61	68
6	58	171,115,067	3,360,890	1,002	39	731	81	26	111	73	67
7	54	159,138,663	3,045,992	866	34	803	90	24	90	76	70
8	50	146,364,022	2,890,692	659	39	568	80	28	86	52	42
9	48	141,213,431	2,581,827	785	15	714	69	19	66	51	55
10	46	135,534,747	2,609,802	745	18	500	64	32	87	56	56
11	46	135,006,516	2,607,254	1,258	48	775	63	24	74	76	53
12	45	133,851,895	2,482,194	1,003	47	582	72	27	106	62	69
13	39	115,169,878	1,814,242	318	8	323	42	16	45	34	36
14	36	107,349,540	1,712,799	601	50	472	92	10	65	97	46
15	35	102,531,392	1,577,346	562	43	473	78	13	63	136	39
16	31	90,354,753	1,747,136	805	65	429	52	32	53	58	34
17	28	81,195,210	1,491,841	1,158	44	300	61	15	80	71	46
18	27	78,077,248	1,448,602	268	20	59	32	13	51	36	25
19	20	59,128,983	1,171,356	1,399	26	181	110	13	29	31	15
20	21	63,025,520	1,206,753	533	13	213	57	15	46	37	34
21	16	48,129,895	787,784	225	8	150	16	5	21	19	8
22	17	51,304,566	745,778	431	21	308	31	5	23	23	23
X	53	155,270,560	2,174,952	815	23	780	128	22	85	64	52
Y	20	59,373,566	286,812	45	8	327	15	7	17	3	2
mtDNA	0.01	16,569	929	13	0	0	0	2	0	0	22
Total		3,095,693,981	155,630,645	19,313	738	12,859					

Table from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_genome

Take a look at that Variation's column? A total of 155,630,645 variations. That's mind-boggling! Do I understand that table? Of course not, it's well beyond my ability to comprehend but I've included it to show that because of its sheer complexity, it is hardly surprising that from a mathematical/statistical point of view, things are likely to go wrong from time to time. At a simplistic level, all that is needed is for a hormone to be secreted at the wrong time, or by an incorrect amount. Alternatively, as I understand the logic, the possibility of a wrong hormone being secreted would have unanticipated effects. Abnormal sexual development, and ambiguous genitalia, can result from genetic and/or hormonal factors.

But sexuality must include far more than that. My thinking, behaviour, temperament, and attitudes I would describe as male, but the scientist would attribute them to be a result of hormones, they are not learned. There is some further discussion on this area in a few pages' time where we talk about the issues of defining gender in sports, and it is recognised that Gender testing is a highly controversial area of scientific debate. There is no perfect method to categorically determine whether someone is a man, a woman or, as is perfectly possible, something in between.

God became known to humanity in the time of Adam, Noah and the Patriarchs, and He revealed himself more completely through the incarnation of Jesus. Being thought of as a male would have helped in conveying a message throughout that period of human history without doubt. But how do we attribute a gender to God. We can't scientifically and visually examine Him, put Him under a knife, extract chemicals and check DNA. He doesn't have chromosomes, so our normal way of determining gender is redundant. We could make a strong case for saying that if there are no chromosomes you can't assign a gender. Indeed, as Numbers 23: 19 says: *"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?"* If God is not human and we can't biologically assess Him, the only way we can attribute a gender is by way of character and behaviour and by what He says of Himself, yet there are many instances where God exhibits feminine characteristics. How does that work? Many Christians get very exercised if people say God is feminine, stridently affirming that because His behaviour is male, and He seems to call Himself a male, then that is what He is. (We will come back to this issue later.) Then in the next breath we condemn a Transwoman who calls herself female, and whose temperament and behaviour indicate a different gender to that assigned at birth by others. It smacks of double standards. Let's get into the issues then.

In this essay, I will initially address Transgender issues, and then go on to what may be the more difficult area of "being gay or lesbian and being Christian".

– Chapter 5 –

Transgender/Transsexual Issues and Intersex

Why have I included Intersex under this section? Mainly because as far as Christian Theology is concerned there isn't much to write about. I haven't seen anyone get upset about issues surrounding people born with indeterminate or combined gender issues, although non-affirming Christians do seem to have to inconsistently force themselves to jump through all sorts of hoops in accepting intersex, but not other gender/sexuality issues.

Generally, non-affirming Christians seem to be far more sympathetic towards those who appear to have no choice – the intersexed, than towards those **they** see as having a clear choice.

The other reason for including intersex here, is that there are issues those affected have in common with Trans folk, some of which we'll see in the first article.

So, first up, let's define what we're talking about. Here I am grateful to the Intersex Society of North America for a helpful description, although they are focussed on the Intersex condition, initially they talk about Trans. On their site⁹ they say the following:

“People who identify as transgender or transsexual are usually people who are born with typical male or female anatomies but feel as though they've been born into the “wrong body.” For example, a person who identifies as transgender or transsexual may have typical female anatomy but feel like a male and seek to become male by taking hormones or electing to have sex reassignment surgeries.

People who have intersex conditions have anatomy that is not considered typically male or female. Most people with intersex conditions come to medical attention because doctors or parents notice something unusual about their bodies. In contrast, people who are transgendered have an internal experience of gender identity that is different from most people.

Many people confuse transgender and transsexual people with people with intersex conditions because they see two groups of people who would like to choose their own gender identity and sometimes those choices require hormonal treatments and/or surgery.”

It might also be helpful to define Intersex from the same site

(http://www.isna.org/faq/what_is_intersex):

“Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person

⁹ <http://www.isna.org/faq/transgender>

might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside. Or a person may be born with genitals that seem to be in-between the usual male and female types—for example, a girl may be born with a noticeably large clitoris, or lacking a vaginal opening, or a boy may be born with a notably small penis, or with a scrotum that is divided so that it has formed more like labia. Or a person may be born with mosaic genetics, so that some of her cells have XX chromosomes and some of them have XY.

Though we speak of intersex as an inborn condition, intersex anatomy doesn't always show up at birth. Sometimes a person isn't found to have intersex anatomy until she or he reaches the age of puberty, or finds himself an infertile adult, or dies of old age and is autopsied. Some people live and die with intersex anatomy without anyone (including themselves) ever knowing.

Let me give you some statistics:

- *There are more than 40 congenital variations of disorders of sex development.*
- *Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe people born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit into the typical notions of female or male bodies.*
- *Some traits are visible at birth, others not until puberty and some variations in chromosomes may not be physically apparent at all.*
- *Worldwide, up to 1.7% of people have intersex traits, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human rights.*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-39979186>

So, if you are part of a properly functioning church of 100 people, you'll have between one and two Intersex people within your membership, and around seven lesbian and gay folk and an occasional church will have one member who identifies as Trans. If you are part of a church where no-one falls into any of these categories, I believe you need to question how effective you are at responding to the call of Jesus to go out into ALL the world and make disciples of all nations.

A few pages back I introduced you to the term, 'Chimæra'. This is where in the very earliest stages of life, two eggs can be fertilised, but the twins then go on to fuse together to become one individual. In most instances the individual will be unaware, probably for the whole of their life, but they will hold two sets of DNA. It may only be discovered as part of a detailed post-mortem. If, however, one of the twins would have been male and the other female, you can have some unexpected results. Some internal organs may have male DNA and others female. As for the gender, all bets are off, because you could develop as male, female, or any part of the rainbow in between. However, it is important to realise that most intersex persons are not chimæras and most chimæras are not intersex. This is simply yet another anomaly that Christians who talk about gender being binary, must answer.

On BBC Radio 4 in May 2017 a story was told about how doctors have been routinely lying to patients with Intersex conditions:

"A leading paediatric consultant told BBC Radio 4 that withholding the truth of patients' diagnoses had been "widespread".

[They used the example of a woman], now 71, [who] was operated on at the age of 16 to remove her hidden testes. She discovered the truth only when she was 50. [She] was born with complete androgen insensitivity (CAIS), a genetic disorder occurring in between one in 20,000 and one in 60,000 births.

A child born with CAIS is genetically male but their body does not respond to the hormone testosterone properly, so the external appearance of their genitals will look entirely female".

She was 12 when doctors told her mother that Jeanette would not develop like other girls or be able to have a baby but was not told why.

Two years later, aged 16, she had an operation, still unaware of her diagnosis. At the time, she was told nothing - simply that she needed surgery, where they removed internal testes from her body without her knowing.

Life was very difficult. At 28, she got married but found sex with her husband too painful.

"She left her partner two years later, saying she was too "frightened" to have another physical relationship. She did not find out the truth about her medical history until she was 50, when saw the words "testicular feminisation", another term for CAIS, on the front her medical file by chance at an outpatient appointment.

She talked with her GP, who then gave her her medical records to read. "I read my notes and that's when it said I had the womb the size of a matchstick and two fully grown testes, and I cried my eyes out".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-39979186>

There's no-one, I hope, that doesn't have enormous sympathy for someone in that situation, yet those with Trans are only a hair's breadth away genetically, because sexuality and gender are on a spectrum and different conditions will live in different places on that spectrum. To be absolutely clear, penis's and vagina's (or more obviously – Labia's) come in a myriad of different shades, shapes, sizes, widths and lengths, bends to the left, or bends to the right, and we must just grow up, and get over it. There is no standard size penis and/or a standard size vagina – and the Bible happily confirms that, as we'll read later. So quite clearly, it is obviously not binary! Binary is either a zero or a one. Every 'zero', and every 'one', is identical, and, in binary terms, it is impossible to get a 'half' – neither 'one' nor a 'zero'. Those who talk about gender/sexuality being binary, only advertise their ignorance.

While we are getting our heads around the various definitions, and understandings, the Intersex Christian website provides quite a helpful explanation about the

difference between Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sexual Identity (In the following quote, the terms: FTM means Female To Male; and MTF means Male To Female):

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual identity are independent of each other. A person may express any variation of each of these in any combination. To discourage the free expression of identity and orientation by an individual is to impose a damaging burden of conformity.

Sexual Orientation is which sex you find erotically attractive: opposite (hetero), same (homo), or both (bi).

Sexual Identity is how you see yourself physically: male, female, or in between. If someone is born female but wishes to see their body as male in all respects, their sexual identity is male. It is generally rude to speak of such a person as female, since it denies their right to inhabit the social and physical role of their choosing. We call such a person a transsexual, whether or not they have had any surgery. Many FTM transsexuals do not undergo genital surgery, often because of disappointing results or extreme cost. As surgical technique improves, this may change. Since it is healthier for these people to live in accord with their wishes and heartfelt need, we call them men, though they may have a vagina where one would expect to find a penis.

The situation for MTF transsexuals is equivalent, except that the surgery produces a much more satisfying result, both cosmetically and functionally. Nonetheless, many MTF transsexuals elect to not have the surgery, most often because of risk, pain, or cost. Those who retain male sexual functioning may refer to themselves as transgenderists, since it is only their gender which is changed. Those that disown all male sexual function (surgery or no) tend to identify as transsexuals, since they change their sexual function, and therefore their sexual identity.

Gender Identity is how you see yourself socially: man, woman, or a combination of both. One may have a penis but prefer to relate socially as a woman, or one may have a vagina but prefer to relate as a man. One might prefer to be fluid, relating sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman. Or one might not identify as either one, relating androgynously.

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<http://www.uas.alaska.edu/juneau/activities/safezone/docs/transgender.pdf>

While we are learning, how do we address these folks. I am still trying to get my head around the practicalities of how I talk to or refer to people, so rather than try

and explain it in my own words and get it wrong, please can I ask you to read the following articles, which I have used for my own research:

- What Does Gender Nonconforming Mean? - <https://www.verywellmind.com/gender-nonconforming-definition-4582878>
- What Does It Mean to Be Genderqueer or Have a Non Binary Gender? - <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-genderqueer-or-non-binary-4140578>.

Clearly the whole issue is horribly complex, but these are people made in the image of God, and we must do everything we can to honour and respect them.

Gender dysphoria is a term used to describe the condition a Trans person experiences. Wikipedia makes the following comment:

Gender dysphoria (GD) is the distress a person feels due to their birth-assigned sex and gender not matching their gender identity. People who experience gender dysphoria are typically transgender. Evidence from studies of twins suggests that gender dysphoria not only has psychological causes, but may have biological causes as well.

Heylens G, De Cuypere G, Zucker KJ, Schelfaut C, Elaut E, Vanden Bossche H, De Baere E, T'Sjoen G (March 2012). "Gender identity disorder in twins: a review of the case report literature". The Journal of Sexual Medicine. 9 (3): 751–7. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02567.x. PMID 22146048. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_dysphoria

So, we can see there are a fair number of naturally occurring biological anomalies and conditions that don't sit nicely with a standard Christian view that people are either male or female. If you review the material on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disorders_of_sex_development) you will find that there are currently 35 types of Disorders of sex development (DSD). David writes in Psalm 139: 13-14: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."* In the Common English Bible, verse 13 reads: *"You are the one who **created my innermost parts**; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb"*. You can use this as a general praise of God's creation of humanity, but clearly this must present a difficulty to anyone with any deformity or condition. It also creates a problem for those who see this verse literally applying to every human alive today and throughout history – that God is directly responsible for every child born with an abnormality, whether cleft palate, Siamese Twins, spina bifida or Tay-Sachs disease, a fatal disease that affects the central nervous system. I do not believe God is so directly involved, because to believe he actively and deliberately creates life with horrific abnormalities, in my mind, makes him a capricious and spiteful God that I simply don't recognise. *"Birth defects affect one in every 33 babies (about 3% of all babies) born in the United States each year ... accounting for 20% of all infant deaths."* - <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/data.html>. It may be argued that this is a part of the effects of the Fall, and in my view I believe God *allows* these things to

happen, because to intervene, would counter the concept of free-will and faith. If God stopped all abnormalities, scientists would be wondering how, given the number of random things that can go wrong in genetic coding (see the table of the human genome chart a few pages back) everyone was born perfect. Furthermore, we'd then be saying God must stop that busload of passengers crashing off that mountain road, or that plane from crashing. Can't be done. To lighten the mood there is a helpful quote from the brilliant if wholly fictitious Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams:

"The argument goes something like this: "I refuse to prove that I exist," says God, "for proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing."

"But," says Man, "the Babel fish is a dead giveaway isn't it? It could not have evolved by chance. It proves you exist, and therefore, by your own arguments, you don't. QED."

"Oh dear," says God, "I hadn't thought of that," and promptly vanishes in a puff of logic."

That is somewhat tongue in cheek but helps illustrate the problem. (I'm sure Douglas Adam's will appreciate the sweet irony of an atheist gently poking fun at God, being quoted by a committed Christian – that is, not a Christian who has been 'committed', but one who is convinced of his faith!)

Anyway, don't think these problems have only just started to occur in the last few years. They have been happening throughout history. Bishop Alan Wilson, in his book *'More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage'* quotes the following:

Anne Fausto-Sterling reports a curious incident from Piedra, Italy, in 1601: A young soldier named Daniel Burghammer shocked his regiment when he gave birth to a healthy baby girl. After his alarmed wife called in his army captain, he confessed to being half male and half female. Christened as a male, he had served as a soldier for seven years while also a practicing blacksmith. The baby's father, Burghammer said, was a Spanish soldier. Uncertain of what to do, the captain called in Church authorities, who decided to go ahead and christen the baby, whom they named Elizabeth. After she was weaned – Burghammer nursed the child with his female breast – several towns competed for the right to adopt her. The Church declared the child's birth a miracle, but granted Burghammer's wife a divorce, suggesting that it found Burghammer's ability to give birth incompatible with role of husband. (Kindle Locations 597-604). Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Wow! Can you imagine the hoops the church of that day had to jump through? Think of the outrage of pious Christians on the "Twittersphere" today!

When we turn to the Bible, we might be surprised that it recognises that a number of abnormalities can occur, and most of them are referred to in a very matter of

fact way. Without batting an eyelid, most Christians accept without question that giants lived, after all we are all familiar with Goliath and his brothers, but in the same passage (1 Chronicles 20: 5-6 and 2 Samuel 21: 19-21) we also have another huge man with 6 fingers on each hand and 6 toes on each foot:

⁵ In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.

⁶ In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot--twenty-four in all.

We are also probably familiar with reading about the Nephilim (Genesis 6: 4 & Numbers 13: 33) and others who, we are told, were born blind or lame – I'm sure you'll remember Jesus healing the "man born blind". Madness was a recognised condition because David feigned madness, and the Philistine king, wanted to get rid of him saying, "Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?" (1 Samuel 21: 13-15).

As we said just now, it is maybe uncomfortable but perhaps pertinent, to recognise that the Bible talks about the fact that genitalia varies in size, and there is no standard size, some are big and some small. At the risk of making you a bit edgy, let's have a look at a couple of passages from Ezekiel, firstly Ezekiel 16: 25-26, where the prophet is complaining about the promiscuity and idolatry of God's people:

²⁵ At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, spreading your legs with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by.

²⁶ You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbors with large genitals, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity.

Secondly, we have the prophet complaining again in Ezekiel 23: 19-21. It's a bit graphic, but the whole point is to illustrate that whereas Christians like to have everything in nice neat boxes where everything is the same, real life is infinitely varied, and the Bible reflects that.

¹⁹ Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt

²⁰ There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.

²¹ So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.

Clearly the reference to being hung like donkeys and having the emission of a horse is making the point that this wasn't usual, unless you were Egyptian, and these were characteristics that women lusted after in their male partners, so that they too enjoyed satisfaction. In this instance, the Israelites were lusting after the foreign gods and their rites which were a lot more exciting than the worship of God. We all know that in reality, as we said earlier, there is no standard size or

shape for genitalia, whether male or female, so why would it be surprising if things go wrong in the womb when, so many other things go wrong.

The health group LIVESTRONG.com describes the process of fertilisation, and gender development:

Gender is determined immediately upon fertilization. The 23rd pair of chromosomes establishes the sex of the baby. The mother's egg contains an X chromosome, while the father's sperm carries either another X or a Y chromosome. An XX combination means your baby is female and an XY combination means your baby is male. This means that the baby's gender is determined before it is even considered a foetus.

Though during the first few weeks of foetal development your baby's internal and external genital structures are the same, the organs will eventually change. Your baby's gonads will either become ovaries or testicles. The phallus will become either a clitoris or a penis, and the genital folds will become either labia or scrotum. This all depends whether or not testosterone is present. Testosterone will be present in embryos with a Y chromosome, and male sex organs will begin to form. If testosterone is not present, female organs will develop, making female the "default sex" for human beings.

Although your baby's gender is determined immediately upon fertilization, you will not be able to know the sex until about the 16th to 18th week of pregnancy. At around the sixth week your baby will develop a small bud called the genital tuber at the site of the genitals. This will look the same for boys and girls until around the 9th week when the sex organs begin to form. By the end of the 20th week, the external sex organs should be fully formed for both male and female babies.

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/231357-when-does-a-baby-develop-gender/>

Those of us growing up in the 1960's will remember the Thalidomide tragedy, where the drug was used to treat morning sickness. Today that drug can be used to treat certain cancers and leprosy. Wikipedia states:

Thalidomide became an over the counter drug in Germany on October 1, 1957. Shortly after the drug was sold in Germany, between 5,000 and 7,000 infants were born with malformation of the limbs. Only 40% of these children survived. Throughout this world, about 10,000 cases were reported of infants with malformation of the limbs due to thalidomide; only 50% of the 10,000 survived.

At one of the schools I attended as a child there were several children with varying Thalidomide deformities, which was quite distressing for them, because there was so little they could do for themselves. Some couldn't walk, feed or dress

themselves. They relied on others for everything, including going to the toilet. If you had Thalidomide-related deformities could you claim you were “fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”? Did God actively attach hands or stumps to your shoulders instead of arms?

If you have ever taken the time to watch Paralympic sport you will have seen athletes today who have either been born with incredible handicaps, or been severely injured, losing (or losing the use of) single or multiple limbs. Imagine your total dependency on others if you were born with no arms, or stumps extending to your elbow – practical things like brushing your hair, dressing, feeding yourself and using the bathroom, let alone using mobiles and computers, become impossible without a dependency on others. Of course, we are developing some wonderful prosthetics, but there are still limits to what can be achieved.

Alternatively, if you suffered from severe burns; if you had a condition that caused people to treat you as a freak-show, such as the condition afflicting Joseph Merrick (the ‘elephant man’), could you **really** echo David’s words?

Did God actively give me asthma and make my childhood life hell at times, giving my parents great anxiety and distress? Speaking personally, having longed to die as a child because I hated living with the discomfort of chronic asthma – being unable to breathe, I cannot say “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” when applying that verse personally, and I’m sure many others can’t either. For me, I see those words as David’s personal praise of God for his own experience, or a general praise of God’s creation of Humankind. Speaking personally, I just lacked the courage, and probably the creativity and wherewithal, to take my own life, although I longed to die on several occasions. Now, I’m glad to be such a failure!

To give some added context, when I was very young mum would sit up at night with me trying to help me breathe. Three or four years before she died, mum told me that one night probably when I was about three, as my brother was still young enough to be in a cot, I had a coughing fit so severe I stopped breathing. Mum rushed in and got me breathing again, and afterwards, she tells me, she and dad didn’t feel like going back to bed and instead went and had a hot drink and discussed what they would do in the event of my likely death, and the arrangements for a funeral. She tells me it wasn’t an experience of panic, shock or over-reaction, but one of quiet peace with God allowing them to face an uncertain future dispassionately.

On another occasion, while I was in an oxygen tent in hospital - in 1969, I think - I blacked out because I was unable to breathe. I was lucky to survive on that occasion, because it was the middle of the night, and the nurse on duty had gone to the adjoining ward for a few minutes to get a cup of tea with her colleague! She told me she returned to the ward to see me lying on the floor, although the only thing she could see was my head and shoulders protruding beyond the door of the sluice/toilets area of the ward. I remember coming to, breathing oxygen from a mask, straight from a cylinder – that was the best air I have ever breathed! In a

conversation with mum, in April 2015, I realised the hospital never told my parents exactly what happened, so she was quite surprised when I told her the full story. I was staggered they never told her. Hmmm, where have we heard that before? Different times!

As I have said, we are happy discussing and accepting physical abnormalities and mental health issues, whether now or in Biblical times, but as soon as we veer towards gender irregularities (whether that be physical, mental or a combination of both) we get uneasy and defensive, because we tightly cling to the idea there are only two genders in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

There is what I regards as a must-read article on the BBC Sport website about the problem of athletes with uncertain gender:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/athletics/29446276>. There has been a long history of gender issues in sport and this article goes some way to illustrating the nature of the problem. The article highlights the issue of just how significant gender issues are and how frequently these Disorders of Sexual Development can occur. We know, because athletes are tested all the time to see what drugs are in the system, but the general population isn't (there's no need), so, many folks may have a DSD condition that is never diagnosed, and they will be probably oblivious to it to their dying day, and it'll only be an autopsy that flags it up, and maybe, not even then. The point is made *"that elite sport has always been about unfair advantages, be they Usain Bolt's long legs, Michael Phelps' out-of-proportion wingspan, or Sir Bradley Wiggins' cardiovascular system. Sport is not fair"*. Joanna Harper, a medical physicist based in Oregon commented: *"A level playing field is probably impossible to ever achieve, but a more level playing field is worth striving for"*. To that you can probably add Matt Pinsent and Sir Steve Redgrave's lung capacities, said to be 8.5-litre and 7-litres respectively. The average male is 5.8-litres. Just to give a bit more detail about swimmer Michael Phelps: *"his arm span (6ft 7in) is greater than his height (6ft 4in). His lung capacity is said to be 12 litres — double the average man's. His size 14 feet are more like flippers"*.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/9449673/London-2012-Olympics-Faster.-Higher.-Longer.-Stronger.html>.

You will remember the case of Caster Semenya the South African athlete who has broken so many women's records, and won the Olympic Silver in London, until people started to question whether she was fully female.¹⁰ Following gender testing by the world governing body and her native athletics body in South Africa, she was diagnosed as having been born with *"both male and female sexual characteristics, as well as unusually high levels of testosterone, but despite that, cleared to run as a woman"* (From "An interview with Caster Semenya" by Ben Smith on BBC 2's Victoria Derbyshire programme on 20th May 2015 viewable at the time of writing, but not easily downloadable from:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02rrkvk>) At the time the story broke in 2012, there were lurid newspaper headlines, and follow-up articles about "What is a

¹⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/athletics/8210471.stm>

hermaphrodite?" Although cleared to run as a woman, in 2019, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) rejected Caster Semenya's challenge against the IAAF's new rules, that women with significantly higher naturally occurring testosterone, had to take drugs to reduce their levels, or be barred from 400m- to Mile-events. As this is subject to appeal, we'll see where it goes, but the IAAF decision is a bit inconsistent as athletes with higher testosterone can still compete in other events, so it looks like it is targeted at Caster Semenya.

In January 2015, there was an interview with a member of the Equatorial Guinea Women's football team¹¹ at the 2008 African Women's Championship, where this player was accused of not being a woman. She had to strip naked to prove she was, although from what we have read, this was really a rather inadequate and simplistic test, but more to the point, deeply humiliating. After reading these articles you will begin to realise just how much of an issue it is. Remember how the Eastern Bloc used to routinely give testosterone to their athletes? In a sense this was scientists doing much the same as nature has selectively done naturally. In the first of the above BBC articles, one passage reads:

David Epstein is an award-winning writer for the US magazine Sports Illustrated, but he is perhaps better known as the author of "The Sports Gene," a myth-debunking look at "nature versus nurture."

The book details the many physical differences between men and women, including testosterone, which, when you add them all up, explain why unisex sport is a non-starter for most athletic pursuits. As he explains, elite men's running times are about 11% faster than women's, with even bigger differences in jumping and throwing.

"For lots of good reasons, we have decided to have a class of athletes who aren't men," Epstein explained.

"But biological sex is not binary. That means whichever line you draw between men and women it is going to be arbitrary".

What he is saying is that there are a significant number of athletes who fall into the grey area between men and women. The problem is that in Sport you have male participants and then anyone else who is not a man, the majority of whom will be female. The argument in sport is over what constitutes a male athlete and what is female. Most of us instinctively would say it was the physical nature of the gender the athlete was equipped with, but now it is recognised as being far more nuanced. So, as we said just now, today there is no perfect method to categorically determine whether someone is a man, a woman or, as is perfectly possible, something in between.

Sport is trying to level the playing field, so in late April 2018 the IAAF decided that those women with unusually high testosterone (masculine levels) will either have to

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/30760929>

take medication to suppress their testosterone, or change events, or race against men. The new rules say that:

The rules for athletes who have 'differences of sexual development' apply to the 400m, 400m hurdles, 800m, 1500m, one-mile races and combined events over the same distances.

However, 100m, 200m and 100m hurdles are exempt, as are races longer than one mile and field events.

Female athletes affected must take medication for six months before they can compete, and then maintain a lower testosterone level.

If a female athlete does not want to take medication, then they can compete in:

- *International competitions in any discipline other than track events between 400m and a mile*
- *Any competition that is not an international competition*
- *The male classification at any competition, at any level, in any discipline*
- *Any intersex, or similar, classification*

Those who want to compete are not required to undergo surgery.

The IAAF statement said that the rules are "in no way intended as any kind of judgement on or questioning of the sex or the gender identity of any athlete".

It pointed to their latest research which showed there is a performance advantage for females with higher testosterone over the track distances.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/43890575>

This ruling won't just affect Caster Semenya but a number of athletes with high Testosterone including Kenya's Margaret Wambui. It is interesting to note the examples of other athletes in that article going right back to 1936 – so this is not a new issue. I find myself with mixed feelings, because it seems strange that only certain events are being picked on – why make the ruling apply to the 400m hurdles, but not the shorter hurdles distances? Why not apply it across every event? Are they targeting specific known athletes, and the possible alternative events they might enter? 'Differences of sexual development' will be on a spectrum so every athlete with high testosterone will be at a different level, and each athlete's response to a given drug is likely to be different, so how can you ensure fairness? Do you band athletes according to their Testosterone levels – so in some events you may have men and women in the same event? There are other questions that come to mind, but I don't want to get caught up in the minutiae. We blithely assume there are no problems with male sports, but even there you have men with much higher testosterone than others, and they therefore have an unfair advantage. In that instance we just sit there and admire them without

realising it is unfair on those who have worked possibly harder, but don't have the natural body chemistry. Suffice to say Athletics can never be completely fair.

The Bible gives no unequivocal definition of a man and a woman, but simply refers to them as such, and perhaps by their roles (Genesis: women – childbearing; men - ruling the woman and working the land), so it's difficult to make a theological definition.

As Christians, we can no longer keep our heads in the sand, and state categorically that there are only two genders. Clearly there are two dominant genders, but a significant number falling into a third category, also for whom Jesus died. What does Jesus mean to them if we say the Gospel cannot apply to them due to an accident of birth? Truly though, gender is again a spectrum, because, as we said earlier, even though there may be two dominant genders, within those two dominant genders, there are a huge physical variation of shapes and sizes, including crossover ambiguities.

Trans

There is a long history of reported stories – this is not a modern phenomenon. Clearly in the past, surgery and drugs were not an option, but it is quite reasonable to assume people identified as what we understand as Trans, throughout history. Either they kept it to themselves, or they probably moved away from the centre of town/village life. There are some interesting stories you can read on: <https://zagria.blogspot.com/>.

In my view, the biggest weakness of taking an anti-trans position is that you as an outsider can only make guesses about what might be going on during the transition from one gender to the other. If you met the person 5 years later, you are unlikely to know that their current gender differs from their original birth certificate. Some may leave you with questions, like their height or sound of their voice, but unless you were told you may not know. There are naturally occurring tall women and women talking in a deeper register of voice, and naturally occurring men with higher register voice. From where I stand, it also looks like the younger a person is when they transition, the more naturally male or female they end up appearing.

Therefore, as a church, you could have someone join you who has completed their interventionist treatment years ago and has become fully male or female (other than the ongoing hormonal drugs, which you are likely to be oblivious to), and they could be fully active in any area of church life without your being aware of their past. We tend to only get exercised prior to, and during, the transition, because the relationship we have with the person changes. It should also be made clear that not all trans folk undergo surgery. Some choose to physically remain as they are but that may mean that although the body remains either male or female in the strictest sense, they dress as the assumed gender because that is who they really are, and we perhaps just need to get over that. Being a Christian means we get our hands dirty and must be prepared that some situations we face, may have no clear black and white answer, but we need to honour the person/people in a loving

and God-centric way that may go against our latent desire to be able to pigeon-hole everyone neatly.

It is also worth highlighting that you could conceivably get to know someone as a friend without being aware of their history. So, from a church point of view you will inevitably be guilty of double standards, allowing the now fully male or female to join and be actively involved, but blocking the person just setting out on the path. This is presupposing they fit the normal conditions – that being a proclamation of faith in Jesus, and seeking to grow closer to Him each day.

It seems clear to me, both from what I have written above, and from much that I have read, that Trans folk are born with the condition, although it may take years to reveal itself. Around Easter 2015 Louis Theroux did a BBC2 programme looking at Transgender Kids. There were examples of kids from 4-5 upwards. I was left uneasy about the kids at the young end, feeling that no significant treatment should be offered until they reach adolescence. I am not going to be drawn on the age someone can choose to transition—I'll leave others to argue that. I'm sure that will vary for each person, but in the UK I understand surgery can't be undertaken until a person has been living as the identified gender full-time for two years, which as an outsider sounds reasonable. However, there is an issue in the sense that the older the person is when they transition, the harder it becomes to look natural in the new assumed identity. If the transition takes place as they enter puberty, the results tend to look very, very natural, and you are unlikely to be able to tell the difference, at least in normal circumstances. On the programme, the kids in their teens were actually very natural in their assumed identity, in terms of mannerisms, confidence and talking, and actually looked physically good. For most of them becoming the gender they feel they were born to, has nothing at all to do with sex, and procreation, though for a few it was clear they were hurting badly because they realised there was little chance of becoming a parent. For many, it is simply being the assumed gender that provides the satisfaction and wholeness they crave. It certainly isn't for the thrill – anyone still thinking that, simply has no idea, and has made no effort to understand the issue.

However, I recognise that the flip side is that hormones are all over the place during the teenaged years, so decisions (both ways) might be regretted later.

There's been a five-fold increase in the number of children seeking medical help for problems with gender identity since 2010.

There were almost 700 referrals to the UK's only clinic for transgender children in 2014, up from 139 in 2010.

Christian Concern has told Premier it has serious worries about the increase in children as young as 10 being offered drugs to halt puberty so they can fully transition to a different gender.

Andrew Marsh from the organisation said on the News Hour: "Children aren't able to drive until their 17, we can't vote until we're 18 and yet we are suggesting that children aged, perhaps 10, are able to make a

decision to embark on a course that has huge consequences and significance and life changing implications.”

... There's conflicting opinion on treatment for children with gender dysphoria, when they feel like they should be the opposite sex.

Some medical experts claim there's not enough research into the long term effects of letting treatment happen so early in life.

There are claims the majority of children who experience gender dysphoria as a young person will not go on to become transgender.

But Christina Beardsley from The Sybils, a Christian spirituality group for transgender people, told Premier's News Hour it's good we're listening to children.

She said: “Because I think gender can be so stereotypical and there can be such hard boundaries about it then I think it's really brave of these children to say who they are.”

She added that letting children get help early on showed “compassion” from parents and medics.

“It's going to make their lives so much easier as they grow up,” she added.

Research by Sky News also found the number of adults undergoing gender reassignment procedures on the NHS has increased by 74% since 2002. <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Christian-charity-concerned-over-rise-in-transgender-treatment-for-children> 28 Oct 2015

Late in 2020, the UK's High Courts ruled that:

... there would be enormous difficulties for young children weighing up ... information and deciding whether to consent to the use of puberty blocking medication.

“It is highly unlikely that a child aged 13 or under would be competent to give consent to the administration of puberty blockers,” the judges added. “It is doubtful that a child aged 14 or 15 could understand and weigh the long-term risks and consequences of the administration of puberty blockers.”

For treatment of those over 16 it is normally presumed that they have the ability to give consent. But in gender reassignment cases where puberty blockers may lead to subsequent surgical operations, the judges said: “Given the long-term consequences of the clinical interventions at issue in this case, and given that the treatment is as yet innovative and experimental, we recognise that clinicians may well regard these as cases where the authorisation of the court should be sought prior to commencing the clinical treatment.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/01/children-who-want-puberty-blockers-must-understand-effects-high-court-rules>.

For the time being the courts have decided that for those under 18, the courts may need to decide whether treatment is to proceed. Personally, I am uncomfortable about the decision, because I can see the issues from both sides, but I'd prefer an independent psychologist being the one to assess the patient and determining how well the process is understood by the patient, rather than a judge. This decision doesn't just impinge on those identifying as trans, but severely impacts those for whom hormone blockers were originally designed: that group of children who enter puberty years earlier than they should. These folk are now caught up in this legal mess. Another own goal for faith groups and Christian press who were jubilant at winning the court case.

As we saw, the stats show treatment of gender dysphoria has increased quite markedly, however, I suspect that is more to do with the fact that it is slightly more acceptable in society to be transgender, and where it was once impossible, high quality treatment is now possible and continually improving. I suspect that the motivation of those who want to delay treatment to others, is really that they want to do anything to **prevent** treatment. However, as I said just now, I am uneasy about treating the young and very young, and we need to discuss the pro's and con's lucidly, and without acrimony and rancour, and establish a "good practice".

Frequently in Christian pamphlets they will cite an example of a person who Transitioned and later regretted it, or de-transitioned. The clear inference is that many regret it, and therefore no-one should ever transition. When you read any quoted examples, check the footnotes thoroughly and check any dates they quote – do your own research. Make sure the information is current, verifiable, scientific, honest, and watch how statistics are used. One leaflet I was given in 2019 was using the example of someone who transitioned **thirty-five** years ago and regretted it – de-transitioning 27yrs ago. Only one example, and that was so long in the past, and there were other key psychological issues at play! Medical assessments, treatments and surgery were very different at that time.

The incidence of regret following transition is below 4%, and although these 4% may regret transition, the other side of that figure (96% are happy or don't regret it) means a good job is being done. However, it is important to understand why some experience regret: is it rejection by family or friends; is it that the intervention failed to deliver all that had been hoped; was there a medical mistake; is there a psychological issue? Please read this page as there is more useful information than I have quoted: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/myths-about-transition-regrets_b_6160626 And there is a list of 71 peer-reviewed studies on transition-related medical care here: <http://www.cakeworld.info/transsexualism/what-helps/srs>

However, I *will* cite an example where things did not end happily. In 2007 Mike Penner a US sportswriter came out as a transsexual saying that after a short break she would be returning as Christine Daniels. Christine became a media celebrity

and regularly speaking about her transition. Eighteen months later she de-transitioned returning to her former name of Mike Penner. In 2009 Mike took his own life. Most Christian pieces would leave it there leaving you to guess why, or to assume that it was huge regret. But you can read a full account here: <https://www.outsports.com/2019/10/15/20915287/lgbt-sports-history-christine-daniels-transgender-transition-death> Prior to his suicide Mike is reported as saying: "One of the best years of my life was spent being Christine. But I'm never going back". So, the real reasons for the suicide were clearly far more complex, possibly including the suggestion that he seemingly couldn't live without his former wife. Please watch how anti-Trans literature is presented, but also be canny about any glossy pro-trans pieces are. I have tried to present current information wherever I can, and I encourage you to follow every link I give – and do your own digging. I will give one more example, that of Keira Bell, a 23yr old woman who transitioned to a boy when she was 16, and sometime after having a double mastectomy when she was 20, regretted her decision, eventually de-transitioning back to a woman. Her situation was part of the court case referred to at the top of the previous page: See that previous Guardian article and also here: <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Why-Christians-should-welcome-this-landmark-ruling-on-transgender>.

There will always be a few exceptions who regret Transitioning, but why should they prevent the happiness and fulfilment of the rest. Procedures take time, from initial diagnosis, to commencement of treatment (in whatever form that takes), through optional surgeries and cosmetic surgeries to help the person feel and look more like their assumed gender. Surgery is usually never performed until the patient and the surgeon is convinced that it is absolutely right, since malpractice is a serious charge, and could result in the loss of a career and income. Intervention is not done on a whim. However, from the Keira Bell example, it sadly seems there may be occasions when mistakes are made.

The first gender-change operations to occur in Great Britain were performed on Laura Dillon and Robert Cowell. Laura Dillon became Michael Dillon over a few years in the 1940's. She initially took a philosophy degree at Oxford, then during her latter stages of transition to a man, trained as a doctor at Trinity College, Dublin, and ultimately a trained surgeon. Meanwhile Robert Cowell¹², a motor racing driver and Spitfire pilot married and had two daughters. It seems he was never comfortable as a man and transitioned to a woman around 1950, becoming Roberta (Betty) Cowell. Both became close friends, but both sadly died hurt and alone. Cowell aged 93 years old died alone. She was found lying on the bedroom floor of her sheltered-housing accommodation in west London. The flat was so cluttered that the wardens struggled to remove her body. Half-a-dozen people attended the cremation, and news of her death did not spread beyond Twickenham. She had rebuffed attempts by her daughters to make contact later in life. Sadly, it seems she wanted to cut off everything from her past as a man.

¹² <https://zagria.blogspot.com/2012/07/betty-cowell-1918-2011-motor-racer-pilot.html>

Dillon had wanted nothing but a quiet life and anonymity but had been mortified when his story had been splashed across a Sunday newspaper. He fled and spent his remaining years in tremendous unhappiness becoming a Buddhist monk and dying suddenly in 1960. Michael Dillon's story is told in the book: *From A Girl To A Man: How Laura Became Michael* by Liz Hodgkinson and published by Quartet. As of 2020, Betty Cowell's story has yet to be published. Both stories were featured in a 2015 Channel 4 series, *Secret History: The Sex Change Spitfire Ace*.

The oldest person to undergo gender re-assignment in the UK was Ruth Rose in 2014, at the age of 81, and her story is told here:

<https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/britains-oldest-transgender-woman-ruth-rose-we-are-people-our-own-right-1501539>. She continues to be an advocate for the transgender community and told her story on Radio 5 Live in 2018:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-45367841/i-had-gender-reassignment-surgery-at-81>

There is an excellent description of what it is like to be transgender and a Christian: <http://www.chicagonow.com/trans-girl-cross/2012/07/being-transgender-is-not-a-choice/>¹³. Read it and the feedback that followed it. In one of the replies, a correspondent took exception that the author of the web-page was describing the condition like a birth defect, and wrote the following riposte:

[The medical bodies do] *"not classify Gender Identity Disorder as defects, only as inconsistencies between one's identification with a gender versus one's genetic makeup or, as you point out, as a disconnect. A disconnect is not a defect"*.

We can debate whether it is a disorder, a defect, a disconnect or whatever, but we can make it less contentious by making the point that as a result of the Fall we have all been tarnished in all sorts of ways, yes, by disorders, disconnects or disabilities, but also by abilities, so that I have a different IQ level to you, maybe lower, maybe higher - it matters not. You will be better at some things I am rubbish at. For example, you may be a musician, whereas I can't sing and clap at the same time, because I have no sense of rhythm. You might be able to grow lots of fruit and vegetables, where I struggle to make the garden look nice. You might be an artist, whereas I struggle to draw pin-men! You might write nice clear concise pieces, and I waffle! You might be creative, but I need plans to follow/copy, and don't have an imaginative bone in my body! Suffice to say we all differ or were born different, but I don't think it is right or 'of God' to view LGBTQ+ folk as having a disorder or defect, but simply a difference, like being left-handed is a difference.

There is another story that Megan Sommerville (the author of that previous web page) related about how hard it was to be accepted by her family as transsexual.

¹³ The Chicago Tribune site has had a problem since the EU GDPR legislation, so the page currently can't be viewed in the EU, but it can be viewed if you live elsewhere, or use a VPN set to use a US-based server.

You can find that here: <http://www.chicagonow.com/trans-girl-cross/2018/05/the-necklace-the-story-of-a-mothers-love-and-acceptance/>¹⁴.

And the Theology? If one takes the view that we treat the creation of humanity literally, Adam and Eve's IQ would have probably been on the high end of the scale, as we record it today. It would have to, to reflect God's perfect creation. Our base level average of 100 takes into consideration those in society who register well below 100, so with a perfect creation one would logically have to assume a much higher than the baseline, for "Adam and Eve". It could not be too high as that would be a problem: imagine being super-intelligent and having nothing to do but grow food for the family, and have occasional chats with God as he strolled through the garden. There is no hint Adam and Eve were designing super-computers or multi-array radio telescopes! They didn't need to. God gave them what they needed.

It might be that from God's perspective that sex and gender aren't really that important, but that the important thing was the quality of our relationship. In earlier millennia, birth rates needed to be high to offset the high mortality rates, so marriages between people of the same sex, would have been deemed selfish, and against the community interest. Alternatively, from the perspective of everything being perfect, it is reasonable to argue that God intended there to be simply men and women – a binary system. It makes sense from the point of view that you needed male and female to "fill the earth and subdue it," which, in purely mathematical terms, would be slowed down if you had a significant percentage of gay/lesbian and Trans folk in the population. In addition to Adam and Eve, in my view, having a slightly higher level of intelligence, we can suppose that God would have intended us all to have a similar level of potential ability in whatever our chosen field might have been. So, whether you were a farmer, a mathematician, a blacksmith, a child-minder, a homemaker, a carpenter, a musician, a computer programmer, a shepherd, a fashion designer, a physicist, a teacher, a car designer, a doctor/nurse, etc. I believe it is likely everyone's potential would have been higher and not subject to the large range of abilities we see today. After the Fall, everything would have been tainted by the effects. This included: health, death, relationships, but also IQ's and abilities - to think, plan, reason, create, remember, and communicate. So now we have highly intelligent folk of both sexes who are particle physicists, computer designers and engineers, but also folk at the other end of the scale who struggle to learn and retain anything, and entirely rely on others, probably without being aware of it.

I believe God made us for both a physical and spiritual realm where contact with Him was regular, physical, and direct (Genesis 1-3) but the Fall shut that spiritual realm off from us. God then sought a way to reconnect us to that realm. So now we live in the physical world as Christians, occasionally getting glimpses of the spiritual realm as if looking through a curtain, or a mist that occasionally thins. Paul

¹⁴ As note 12.

comments on this when he says: “We look through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face”, when referring to our passing from this realm to the next.

Another parallel some folk have used is that a small minority of folk are born left-handed, and until recent times they were forced to write using their right hand, because left-handedness was considered wrong. Nowadays we never query being left-handed, obviously, but it indicates a perfectly normal but different wiring of the brain. In a sense, it’s quite minor, but why shouldn’t sexuality be any different – most people conform to a norm, but a small group don’t, and are different.

People frequently argue that God only created male and female, so anything else is wrong, and cannot be supported Biblically. Case closed. That theology seems extremely selective and flimsy. It is an argument that, from my perspective, really doesn't stand up to scrutiny, as I have argued earlier. On the one hand, at that time sin and disease weren't at play. It was pre-Fall. On the other, the line of argument is silly, and hasn't been thought through: God didn't make people white at the time of Adam, nor yellow, nor probably black, but probably brown. So technically if our utopian model is at the beginning of Creation, white folk are an aberration. Nobody says being white is an aberration of the created norm, and yet it probably is, in the strictest sense. The argument can be made even more silly by saying that at the time of Adam, male hands and feet came in one size, so any other later sizes, were an aberration.

You can also say that blue eyes were not the default at creation. It was far more likely to have been brown eyes, yet the aberration of blue eyes is seen to be beautiful, and maybe, being gay, or Trans, or ..., can also be seen to be beautiful. (example ‘borrowed’ from Josh Weed’s post, “Turning a Unicorn into a Bat...” - <http://joshweed.com/turning-unicorn-bat-post-announce-end-marriage/>.) Eyes obviously come in other shades, and all of them are technically aberrant from Adam and Eve. Ginger hair...? I’m sure you’ve got the message!

Don't forget however, that Jesus came to take away all the differences - neither Jew nor gentile, slave or free, male and female, blond or ginger. Jesus embraces all folk, especially those we call sinners, and gets pretty miffed at the religious zealots who love to embrace the Law. You could perhaps also argue that He didn’t directly create children, although he created the potential for children, and the potential for change. If potential is built in, especially after the Fall, then anything can happen in any part of the human anatomy - we can even have people being born with white/black/yellow skin – what an abomination from God’s Creation!

Whether the Fall, or Original Sin occurred exactly as Genesis depicts it, it does provide a framework to work through our Theology – I see the Genesis story as perhaps a myth or picture that teaches us about sin, but you can argue about how literal it is, so knock yourself out! It’s not the hill I choose to die on.

John Calvin’s idea of Total Depravity built on St. Augustine’s earlier work, but I don’t really accept that anymore. However, this essay is built on the concept of Original Sin because that was my background and will be the position of much of the Church here in the West. Hence, I want to show that even within that

theological space, we must fully accept and embrace our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.

From what you have read, you can see that the Fall has affected every element of life on Earth – it has physically affected you and me (I have Asthma, eczema, sciatica, I wear glasses, and probably have a handful of other issues that are less obvious), so why do we sit here and pretend that the area of gender, orientation and sex will remain untainted by the Fall. We must expect that **that** part of the Fall would result in biological and neurological confusion, and so babies are born from time to time with many conditions, including intersex. As they grow older, they will become adults.

One such example is an unnamed (publicly) person born as an Intersex baby and assigned a gender they couldn't identify with. When becoming an adult, they decided to change, and with the change, took on a different name to represent who they really are, and they asked Steve Chalke's Oasis church to give a blessing. The story is told below:

Explaining the decision, Steve Chalke said: "This person was born intersex, which means they have both sets of sexual organs. Their parents made the decision to raise them as a girl and they had a physical operation. But of course, they're wired differently!

"This guy says all he ever wanted to do was be a mechanic and play with cars. He lived the first 20 years of his life in utter guilt because his parents are committed Christians. He went to his parents because he was a girl and said I want to have a sex change and be a man.

"He thought they'd have a meltdown. His mum sat him down and said, 'actually when you were born you were intersex and we chose for you to be a girl and I've always thought it was the wrong decision'."

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Steve-Chalke-to-host-church-renaming-ceremony-for-transgender-man>

The significance here is that it appears to be a Christian family facing these difficult decisions – "one of our own". Many similar situations are dismissed by the church, simply because we can't be sure we are being told the truth, or that it's out **there** somewhere and we don't need to think about responding, because it doesn't touch us.

Just as this man experienced gender dysphoria whilst growing up as a girl, knowing that she was really male, many others will be born who will, at some stage, develop gender dysphoria. How can they make sense of a loving God as they grow older, if we are not there to help them? If as a church we find out about someone's gender-change later in the person's life, how do we respond. What if anything, do we say to them? Hopefully we'll embrace them for who they are. Why shouldn't some folks be wired in the brain as female, but have the genitals of a male, and vice versa. It doesn't make it right or wrong, it's just a recognition of what happens! Statistically, you would expect it to happen, so it can't be a surprise.

Those affected will respond in one of three ways:

- Some will opt to undergo whatever procedures are necessary to live their lives to the full in the gender they relate to.
- Some may simply choose not to undergo surgery but change to live life as the gender they have chosen.
- Some may be unable to deal with the issue of going through any form of gender reassignment, so keep everything to themselves and live as their birth-assigned gender. Does that make them better or worse than those who do undergo treatment? I expect neither, though the church will tend to love those who choose to do nothing except continue in their birth-assigned gender more, because the person is suffering in silence (accepting their “thorn in the flesh”, and making their personal sacrifice), and that makes it theologically nice and easy for us, though probably hell for them. It is probably less likely they will be able to relax and be the person God intended, because they will always be wary and cautious in case their secret gets out beyond those they can trust, and people then make life difficult for them.

On a personal note, I think the situation I would find the most confusing is the one where the individual varies between one gender and the other (termed gender-fluid). It can be difficult when talking about Josephine (for example) who is sometimes known as Philip, because it is so hard to use the correct personal pronoun. Today, is it he/him, or she/her? It is difficult when someone you have known for a long time transitions from one gender to the other - you have had many years, or a lifetime of referring to them as ‘he’ and ‘him’, and now you must remember to change to ‘she’ and ‘her’ (or vice versa), and this can result in genuine mistakes. But if the situation is more fluid where sometimes Josephine comes to church and Philip comes to Home Group, or vice versa, getting not just the pronoun, but their name right every time becomes very difficult. And yet we need to respect and honour them. Just because a situation is difficult, or even very difficult, doesn’t make it morally/theologically wrong.

One of the other issues relevant here is that Trans people are not going through treatment for the ‘kick’ or ‘thrill’ that certain Christians would attribute, but for the sake of being made whole. They want to become the person, they always felt they were meant to be. (No-one questions corrective surgery for cleft-palette, hair lip and many other conditions.)

There has been a certain amount of discussion in the Anglican church about the idea of Trans folks wanting to reaffirm their new name and identity before God. In this regard I was interested to read the following by the late Rachel Held Evans:

“Our society tells us that if and when we get ‘there’—the job or position or degree we’ve always wanted—that’s when all the important stuff will start happening. Not so. All the good stuff happens in obscurity.” Indeed, some of Scripture’s most momentous events occur not at the start of a journey, nor at the destination, but in between, in

the wilderness. Jacob wrestles with the mysterious stranger. Moses encounters the burning bush. The Israelites receive the Law that will shape them as a people for millennia to come. It is in the wilderness that John the Baptist, complete with locusts in his beard and honey on his lips, baptizes repentant sinners and prepares the world for Jesus, channeling the prophet Isaiah by declaring, "A voice . . . [is] calling in the wilderness. 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him'" (Matthew 3: 3). The people of God would do well to listen to those who have sojourned in the outskirts. It's worth noting that at the culmination of nearly every wilderness journey is a naming. After receiving a new name of his own, Jacob, now called Israel, names the place where he wrestled with God Peniel, which means "face of God." Hagar names the well of her salvation Beer Lahai Roi, "I have seen the God who sees me." So when we join with our spiritual ancestors in telling our stories of deliverance, we must remember to name each wilderness, to mark those spots where, when all hope seemed lost, we encountered God — at a desert well on the road to Egypt; on a bridge in Selma, Alabama; at a shabby airport chapel in Chicago; in a labor and delivery room on Candlemas Day.

Rachel Held Evans, *Inspired* (p. 49). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

I can only imagine, that for the Trans, and indeed for most of the LGBTQ+ community, the wilderness years are those that they live in hiding, in the fear of discovery, and when they are finally free to be who they are, the experience is like that of encountering God for the first time. Indeed, there may well be a real fresh encounter of God, so it is entirely appropriate that their story of deliverance includes taking on a new name, not just a name appropriate to the gender, but one that can be commemorated before God. Remember how God renamed Abram as Abraham, Jesus named Simon, "Peter" and Saul became Paul.

Moving on, Transvestitism or Cross-dressing is a very confusing area, because it seems participants can be gay or straight, and in some cultures, it can be practised for religious, traditional or ceremonial reasons, as well as being used by some within the Trans community. Also, the understanding of what constitutes a Transvestite seems to differ depending on what you are reading, so it is a very muddy area!

However, I believe that Transvestic Fetishism, done purely for the erotic thrill that includes sexual gratification is a different scenario, because many but not all are straight. (see

<http://www.uas.alaska.edu/juneau/activities/safezone/docs/transgender.pdf>) This is something that I believe ought to come under scriptural teaching. I would say the Biblical teaching of respect for others and restraint of excessive unhealthy appetites comes into play. Sexual activity is designed to be exciting and thrilling, but I'm talking about where it is taken to excess, for self-centred, personal gratification to the exclusion or submission of the partner – this I believe to be wrong. Paul talks

about making my body a slave, so that I can focus on God's Kingdom, and my feeling is that cross-dressing for erotic/arousal purposes is a much more selfish act to be discouraged, where sex with your partner should be for mutual enjoyment. Few partners of those involved in Transvestic Fetishism will be comfortable about things, so where is the selfless respect for their feelings?

*²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, **I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave** so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 Corinthians 9*

However, if I learn more and can be convinced that I need to change my view, that will happen. And of course, those verses cannot be used to justify sadomasochism, because that goes against the ethics of this whole piece!

Going back a hundred years or so cross-dressing was a term that covered everyone who wore the clothes of the opposite sex. Magnus Hirschfeld coined the word transvestism (from Latin trans-, "across, over" and vestitus, "dressed") to refer to the sexual interest or arousal of those who practiced cross-dressing. He also performed the world's first reported gender reassignment operation in 1930/31 – so clearly some of his patients were transgender in our current parlance, rather than transvestite. As I've already said, the reward for trans folk of dressing as the opposite sex, or undergoing surgery, is simply the contentment of now being what you had always been intended to be – it's not about sexual arousal.

However, this whole gender-fluid area is quite confusing at times, and most of my reading in this area tended to indicate that Trans folk would seek to create and become this new identity. On the other hand, as I have read more and more, I found that some crossdressers want to stay with the bodies they were born with, but from time to time dress as the opposite gender to feel more complete. They will also create new names that they will use when dressed in their other persona. There is a very helpful article written by Elaine Sommers, on the Accepting Evangelicals site dealing with this thorny issue in a great deal more detail: <http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/transgender/fgm1/> The article includes a little bit of the theology Elaine uses, to help us understand her situation – and there is a pdf version of the page you can download.

In my investigation, I came across a factsheet issued on behalf of San Francisco Dep. of Public Health which I initially found on the www.transgenderlaw.org website (I mention the address in case they restore the link) but as it is no longer there, I searched and found it again on: www.transcentralpa.org/content/downloads/NGLTF_transfactsheet.pdf. In it, it records the following about men in the San Francisco area identifying as trans:

- 83% reported verbal abuse because of their gender identity or gender presentation
- 37% reported physical abuse
- 46% reported employment discrimination
- 37% reported housing discrimination
- [In addition, it reported that] a nationwide survey of bias-motivated violence against LGBTQ+ people from 1985 to 1998 found that incidents targeting transgender people accounted for 20% of all murders and about 40% of all police-initiated violence

(The female to male statistics were in some instances even higher.)

One other statistic of note in the document mentioned that “recent statistics from the Netherlands indicate that about 1 in 12,000 natal males undergo sex-reassignment and about 1 in 34,000 natal females”.

Looking at the UK, the Women and Equalities Committee estimated that as many as 650,000 people in the UK are “gender incongruent to some degree” and said it was believed that around one third of transgender adults and half of transgender young people attempt suicide. In a 2010 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in the USA reported that 41% of 7,000 Transgender people polled had attempted suicide – that’s not just considered it but had acted on it.

Some people take these figures to show that Trans people are simply people with mental health issues, but that’s putting the cart before the horse. The reality is that they start out no more unstable than the rest of us, but the stresses they are under far exceed ours, and all too frequently, push them over the edge.

In a BBC News article (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-30783983> by Regan Morris.) the following was quoted:

“Transgender adults who cannot easily pass as their gender identity have higher rates of suicide, are more likely to be murdered, and often face discrimination in the workplace.

“There’s no reward for being trans, no reward. There’s a lifetime of medication, giving up your fertility, it is more challenging to do life when you’re trans,” says Dr Olson, pointing out that for people who decide to transition it feels like the only option they have to live as their authentic selves”.

In a BBC Horizon episode in 2017, called “Being Transgender”, it was stated that

“as many as 40% of Transgender people have attempted suicide. Samantha: “There’s only so much abuse you can take from ... people, before eventually, life just seems to get easier, thinking about dying”.

In the same programme Dr Baudewijntje Kreukel of the VU University Medical Centre in Amsterdam, reported on how some tests are being conducted on Trans-boys and Trans-girls to see whether there is any difference in the brain activity of

these patients, when compared to a control group. Early results tend to show that Trans-men/women's brains react in the manner of their identified gender, not their biological gender. This has been echoed in these pages:

- <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180524112351.htm>
- <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/research-on-the-transgender-brain-what-you-should-know/>
- <https://www.the-scientist.com/features/are-the-brains-of-transgender-people-different-from-those-of-cisgender-people-30027>

Whilst we look at the science of the body it is interesting to note that on an episode of a podcast by Dr Hannah Fry (Associate Professor of Mathematics) called *Deep Mind: The Podcast*, she reported that in 2018 a group of researchers using Artificial Intelligence algorithms decided to try to use Deep Learning on images of the retina to see whether it were possible to predict the sex of the patient from the retinal image. The best guess a human eye doctor would manage is a 50/50 guess, but the algorithm got an incredible 97% success rate, so it shows that our gender must somehow be structurally hard-coded into our retina. What had the algorithm spotted about the structure that we haven't? Nobody is sure at the moment, but it is fascinating work. I would love to have explored those additional 3% to see why they were 'wrong', and how would the retina of a Trans person display?

<https://deepmind.com/blog/article/welcome-to-the-deepmind-podcast>

Meggan Sommerville is a Christian transgender woman with a heart for educating others about the transgender community and her faith in her Saviour, wrote:

The American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association define this recognized medical condition as a disconnect between the gender assigned at birth and gender roles the brain identifies with. In basic language the brain's gender is not in line with the physical gender of the body. This disconnect can cause increasingly more distress over a persons life span. Because of this distress and societies lack of understanding, many transgender individuals unfortunately feel that the only solution is to end their life. A 2010 study, done by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, reported that while 1.6% of the general public attempts suicide, over 40% of trans people do so. As a side note, I was nearly part of this statistic. (<http://www.chicagonow.com/trans-girl-cross/2012/07/being-transgender-is-not-a-choice/>¹⁵).

This is helpful, because it is a transwoman speaking from personal experience of contemplating suicide, not a psychologist trying to interpret data and statistics.

In 2014 Tori Banks was 23 and began transitioning in 2012. In 2011, while living as a gay man in Leicester, she had petrol poured over her and was set on fire in a suspected random homophobic attack. She suffered serious burns but says the

¹⁵ There are some problems with this site in Europe since the GDPR legislation, but you can view it if you use a VPN attached to a server in the US.

experience prompted her to reassess her life. (Originally sourced from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/28751327> but as the link has been broken, I found another link to a companion piece here: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/video-i-used-gay-man-3197551>.)

These people are not exhibitionists – why put yourself in a place where you lose friends and, in many instances, your family. Why give up your own fertility? Why place yourself where some people end up loathing and hating you, even though they have never met you? The price you pay for being different is so high. If you are married, think how you'd feel and react if your spouse quietly told you one night that they really need to talk to you, and that they are in agony and torment because they feel they are actually a different gender, to what everyone thinks. Is that a price you think is trivial for you and your family to go through? Could your marriage and family survive?

However, if people achieve a measure of peace with themselves in place of the previous turmoil, maybe going through transition and gender reassignment can be a price worth paying, but certainly the extraordinarily high cost for everybody, makes it plain this is not a choice but a hard-wired issue in the brain that cannot be changed. (The strapline of the Independent's piece on Robert/Betty Cowell, who we looked at just now, was "It's easier to change a body than to change a mind" and this gets to the heart of the issue.)

In May 2019 the World Health Organisation (WHO), removed gender identity disorder from its diagnostic chapter - or it basically no longer classified being transgender as a mental illness. CBS reported it thus:

The United Nations' health agency released a revised version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) that reclassifies "gender identity disorder" as "gender incongruence," which is now featured under the sexual health chapter rather than the mental disorders chapter.

Gender incongruence is better known as gender dysphoria, the feeling of distress when an individual's gender identity is at odds with the gender assigned at birth. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/world-health-organization-removes-gender-dysphoria-from-list-of-mental-illnesses/>

Placing it with the sexual health chapter, indicates it is a normal part of being human, not something that has gone wrong. I wonder whether our fixation on how we see what we consider is a 'real man', or 'real woman', has contributed to people wanting surgery, so they more closely match the ideal. If our understanding of gender was determined by character, attitudes, behaviour, etc., it might be that fewer people would see the need for intervention. That's maybe a philosophical alley we can quietly sidle past!

– Chapter 6 –

What the Bible says about Trans

We can't allow emotion to rule our thinking, so what does our theology have to say? In addition, what does Jesus have to say to all these individuals? I will treat this as comprehensively as I can, to make it difficult to dismiss the arguments easily. (That's really why this opus has become so long!) So, in the following pages we will look at what people *think* the Bible says about being Trans, and we'll look at a few other passages as well. As Christians, we must have something to say to the Trans community about Jesus that doesn't involve hellfire and damnation, because He never used those terms Himself and neither should we. You might argue that Jesus got cross with those who refused to turn away from their sin. Yes, that's true, but his anger and denunciation was towards the church of His day, who loved all the petty rules, and loved to keep the vulnerable in their place, which was down there somewhere, below us. Familiar? There are at least three examples of Jesus getting cross, though many more where he demonstrated irritation:

- Jesus clearing the temple of the money-changers - Matthew 21; Mark 11; John 2
- His healing of a man in Capernaum on a Sabbath in the synagogue – Matthew 12; Mark 3; Luke 6.
- Jesus seven woes to the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees – Matthew 23: 13-33. That's a very powerful passage, read it. After all he's talking to us as the established church.

On each of those occasions, and in other places where he is described as indignant, or accuses his hearers of hypocrisy, he is addressing the religious leaders of his day. Never, that's **NEVER**, does he express anger towards the ordinary person, and I'm quite sure nothing has changed. And, just as in His day, today's church says, "You can't mean us, we're doing everything right! We're doing what the Bible says we should do".

A little earlier I mentioned my own desire to end my life when I was young. A high percentage of trans folk along with other LGBTQ+ folk find that with their own feelings of unease within themselves, rejection and isolation from friends and family, the treatments they may have to undergo, and the way they are treated by others (including the church universal) – both violent and non-violent, lead to depression and a markedly higher suicide rate than the general population. I can't quote accurate figures here because there seem to be queries over statistical methodology in the statistics I was looking at, so it's best to simply acknowledge the higher suicide rate and move on. In addition, the academic papers I found, were far too dry for inclusion here!

Many Christian folk see transgender issues as being an emotional or psychological problem, and this allows them to continue to declare that God's desire of gender being a clear male and female split, as still irrevocable. To my mind, this denies the

effect of the Fall, which we discussed earlier, and Jesus' own words about some 'eunuchs who are born that way' – which we will get to eventually! Let me give an example. When talking about trans and intersexed Sue Bohlin of Probe Ministries states:

There are really two issues here: 1) transgendered people and 2) the intersexed (new term) or hermaphrodites (older term).

The first is usually an emotional problem, not really a sexual one. The "transgendered" label reflects a sexual identity confusion and not a true condition. God doesn't create a person with the genitals of a male and the consciousness and heart of a female. In Genesis 1: 26, the Bible says, "And God created man in His image, in His likeness; male and female He created them....and it was very good." Maleness and femaleness are God's choice, determined at conception.

<https://probe.org/what-is-a-biblical-view-of-transgendered-people-and-hermaphrodites/>.

I believe Sue Bohlin to be profoundly wrong and simplistic in her treatment and understanding of that passage of Scripture, and I'm sure she would regard me in the same way! I will explain my comment shortly. However, although on that page there is a discussion about how hormones and chromosomes affect the foetus, the application of this thinking is very simplistic – limited to the prejudicially narrow confines of insisting gender is binary. Furthermore in a linked article on that page <https://probe.org/how-does-the-bible-support-your-view-that-god-intends-for-males-to-grow-into-masculinity-and-females-to-grow-into-femininity/> she writes:

I would define masculinity as the characteristics of being male, and femininity as the characteristics of being female, per God's intention. I would also suggest that as a culture, we have a too-narrow idea of what it means to be male and to be female. I think that masculinity is a spectrum from the rough-and-tumble, athletic-loving male to the sensitive, artistic, musical, aesthetic-loving male, and everything in between. I think that femininity is a spectrum from the girly-girl to the tomboy/jockette, and everything in between, and it pleased God to make both male and female, masculine and feminine, in His image. That's a VERY wide range!

We don't have a Biblical description of gender, so Sue Bohlin has created her own definition that talks about spectrums without understanding the logic of where her own arguments lead. She has placed artificial boundaries on those spectrums which we just don't observe in the real world. What I have written about already and what we will look at as we proceed, will demonstrate the weakness of that thinking.

Furthermore, The Christian Institute (Scotland) issued a six-sided A5 brochure entitled "Transsexualism" in September 2016. In it they echoed the mantra that God makes us male and female, and anything else was to be in "defiance of their Creator". They say that "Christians believe that a person's sex is determined by

God from conception". Then on the same page they have a section entitled "Intersex is Different" where they argue that "a number of chromosomal and hormonal conditions" [arise] "and it is difficult to determine exactly how often such conditions occur...". So, for these folks with an intersex condition, did God get it wrong at conception? You can't have it both ways. This type of woolly and ignorant thinking from those who are supposed to be theological experts makes me very cross! If "chromosomal and hormonal conditions" can occur causing intersex conditions, then why not Trans (or gay)? There is a complete failure to work through the logic of their theology.

As we have started turning to the theology of the issue, let's see exactly what scripture says. Firstly, let's look at that quote from Genesis 1. This is God's creation plan for humanity, and it is perfectly good and clear. According to a literalistic understanding of Creation, it looks like God **did** only create two sexes.

However, He also initially intended that we live much longer lives since there is no talk of death, but presumably, along with all the other effects of the Fall, that has also changed. Length of lifespans changed from the time of Noah. Post-Noah, ages began to drop to the "three score years and ten" we are used to today, though not straight away. The drop was gradual – check your Bible genealogies. Why mention lifespan? Well, we often imply that by becoming a Christian we can get back to an Adam and Eve relationship with God, and that just isn't true. Although we can spiritually walk with God and Jesus His son, we cannot physically see Him/them, and neither are we physically restored to God's physically-perfect creation. (Look around you, just because you become a Christian, Creation hasn't ceased to groan – Romans 8.) We have a relationship enabled by the sacrifice of Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, but no way are we back in Eden. We never will be while we live here on Earth, though one day we will receive "resurrection bodies" similar to Jesus' and walk on the "new Earth" which will be far better! Our Christian faith does mean our spiritual relationship with God, here on Earth, can be restored to a degree (our sins are nullified, and we are made holy in God's sight), though our humanity will limit our capabilities. We currently see God darkly, as though through frosted glass, but eventually, we will see Him face-to-face. A return to the Eden-type relationship with God cannot happen until we have our 'resurrection' bodies and meet Him face-to-face.

I will look even more closely at the Genesis 1 passage in a few pages.

Logically, as I mentioned a few pages back in the previous chapter, using the model of "the Fall", I believe that if humanity had remained sinless, God would have intended us to have full health, similar IQ's, abilities to think, reason, create, remember and communicate, so we could fully fulfil God's mandate to us to look after his creation. However, with the entrance of sin into the world, every atom in creation was tainted, as Paul writes in Romans 8: 20-23:

"²⁰Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into

the glorious freedom of God's children. ²² We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labour pains up until now. ²³ And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free".

Whilst there are a good number of what are normally described as "clobber" passages of Scripture directed at the gay or lesbian, there are very few that can be directly or indirectly pointed at transgender people – in fact there is only one very tenuous passage, and a few others which might shine a light. So, let's look at what we've got:

Deuteronomy 22: 5: - *"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this".*

This is the most common verse used to deal with the situation. However, it has been misused, and, to my mind at least, it is simply lazy and ignorantly used theology. It is similar to saying the Bible says "There is no God". Except that when you look at Psalm 14 verse 1, it says: - *"Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good"*. It's being taken out of context.

Now, look closely at this chapter. The first four verses relate to farming – how you are to return property to the owner, whether it be an ox, donkey, cloak or whatever. If you can't return it, you must look after it until you can. Likewise, if an animal has fallen over, help it get back on its feet. We then have this single verse which lacks any context and is ambiguous at best, after which, we have two verses about what you are permitted to do with a bird's nest. Then there follow more common-sense verses about making the flat-roof safe to walk on, not mixing seed and not ploughing with different sized animals. We are then told not to mix fibres when making clothes, and to put tassels on your cloak. I would argue that if we focus on verse 5, we also must focus on the rest of the chapter and fulfil those requirements. The real problem then comes in verses 13 to 30 where punishments are described for promiscuity. A lot of stoning for violations is prescribed, but I don't hear a clamour for us to fulfil these verses – we quietly pretend they aren't there. If you are seriously going to base a whole theology about Trans inclinations on this one verse, you are absolutely obliged to take the content of the whole chapter and fulfil it entirely, including verse 29, where the rapist is required to marry his victim with no possibility of divorce. If you regard integrity highly, you do not have a choice.

I would therefore expect to see anyone who thinks this is about transgender issues, removing from their wardrobe all clothes made of mixed fibres, and sewing tassels on the corners of all their coats. If you don't do this, what spiritual authority did you use to determine you could set aside these laws, and bolster a law that doesn't apply to you, or touch you in any way, *but only affects others?*

Since there are 18 verses about marriage violations, I would also expect you to be out stoning to death the promiscuous, and the adulterers. I would want to ask

another question: if there are two verses about treating birds in their nests, immediately following the command about clothing, what does that say about the seriousness of the issue, especially as there are 18 verses about marriage violations further on? If transgender issues are so much against what God stands for, why is there literally nothing else about it and no general guiding principles, especially as we are so (rightly) concerned about birds and their nests? Not only is there nothing more in this chapter, but there is nothing else in the whole of Scripture directly about being Trans. Please don't say the issue is only new – there have likely been Trans folk around since the dawn of time, it's just that nowadays interventions make it possible to correct it, and so there is greater light in this dark area. Until recently, trans folks generally had to keep a low profile, but now something can be done, they are able to step forward and ask for help and treatment. From where I stand, quoting this verse is rather lame and desperate when Jesus's teaching about dealing with the outcast, is so clear.

Let me make one other point, every other law in Deuteronomy 22 has a very clear and obvious objective – even if a few are a bit draconian or offensive to us today. Verse 5 is the only one that doesn't, so how can we be certain what Moses was referring to?

As I said, there are no other verses in the whole of Scripture dealing with this issue of men's and women's clothing, though Paul comments that he does "... *want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,* ¹⁰ *but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*" (1 Tim 2: 9-10). How many Christian women wear jewellery – even if its fake. It's supposed to look like gold, silver, diamonds, pearls, or furs at a quick glance. And nobody says a word!

Preachers are fond of reiterating the significance of repeated stories and teaching, explaining that we must take it seriously because it is repeated several times. So, if one of the stories of Jesus is repeated in three of the Gospels, you must sit up and take notice. Using their own logic how can you build a whole theology on one unclear verse, never repeated anywhere else, especially if it results in hurt to other children of God?

If you seriously want to base your whole anti-Trans theology on this one verse, then how are you going to handle those verses that require widows to marry their brother-in-law after the death of their husband (called 'Levirate marriage' - Genesis 38: 7-10; Deuteronomy 25: 5), or the requiring of victims of rape, to marry their rapist (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29. Yes, the same chapter as we've been looking at!)? In that last example the victim of the rape NEVER has a chance of divorce – ever, because her husband is banned from seeking divorce. The problem here is that women are the property of their husband or father, not their equals, as Paul taught in Galatians 3: 26-28, which we'll get to shortly.

We have ended up picking and choosing which laws we follow and which we dismiss, and it is largely based on individual preference, rather than a clear set of Biblically based principles. In Leviticus 19, we read:

27 "Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. 28 "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD' ".

Although I have no problem accepting the idea I should not cut myself for the dead, every one of us has no problem cutting the hair at the sides of the head or clipping off the edges of a beard - we happily ignore them! Many Christians now sport tattoos – some even with a religious/Christian theme. What was the basis for their deciding to ignore these laws, but retaining the law of Deuteronomy 22: 5? Who tells us we can turn a blind eye to one verse, and highlight another?

On that point, in the chapter prior to this in Deuteronomy, we are told that disobedient children are to be stoned:

18 If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, 19 his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. 20 They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." 21 Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Deuteronomy 21: 18-21

Disobedient daughters aren't mentioned! Do they get off scot free? Of course, they do, because they were regarded as property, not as people with a value. And those who work on a Sabbath are to be put to death according to Exodus 35:

2 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a day of Sabbath rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it is to be put to death.

Then we can add everyone who sacrifices to any other god, other than the Lord, in accordance with Exodus 22: 20. We live in a society tolerant of many different religions, and if we include those whose god is money, or food, or drink ... :

20 "Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD must be destroyed".

So that includes our Sikh and Hindu neighbours, etc. Ouch! And while we are lining up folks to be killed, let's even add those who charge interest on their loans:

*10 "Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things 11 (though the father has done none of them): "He eats at the mountain shrines. He defiles his neighbor's wife. 12 He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols. He does detestable things. 13 **He lends at interest and takes a profit. Will such a man live? He will not!** Because he has done all these detestable things, he is to be put to death; his blood will be on his own head. Ezekiel 18:10-13*

You can kind of understand killing a violent man, who rapes a neighbour's wife and is guilty of robbery, and at a stretch, perhaps someone involved with celebration and feasting at the temple of an idol, but the idea of killing someone who "lends at

interest and takes a profit" - well, that's a bit alien in today's western culture. Maybe we should cull all bankers! Perhaps that would have prevented the last financial crash! Oh, but that could be a problem when you come to apply for your mortgage! But I hope you get my point. How do you justify saying that these verses on my right, still apply, and these on my left, don't?

We also have the problem that in Leviticus 20 we are instructed that homosexuals are to be put to death, yet not even Evangelical Christians demand death these days for homosexuals. They don't like them, and they'll throw them out of church¹⁶, but they won't kill them. On the one hand many people say we should treat the whole of Scripture as God-breathed and keep the whole law, then these same people say that certain laws don't apply. If you are one of these folks, why does this law no longer apply? Clearly it shouldn't, but many Christians are guilty of picking and choosing which laws still apply with no real foundation for their decision. In my mind, there is a certain amount of hypocrisy about this.

I said just now that Deuteronomy 22: 5 lacks context. By that I mean, is every situation of wearing the clothes of the opposite gender wrong? What about actors in a play/film? Consider the late Robin Williams playing the part of "Mrs Doubtfire", in an effort to see his estranged children. How about the Christmas Pantomime Dame? What about as a disguise - maybe a Christian escaping a repressive regime, or the Second World War prisoner of war escaping prison dressed as a woman. Maybe someone dressing as the opposite sex for their own safety. (A good example of that would be Maria Toorpakai a professional squash player and Pakistan's top female player. She was born in what she calls "the most dangerous part of the world" - the Taliban heartland of Waziristan. It's an area where girls rarely left home and were forbidden from playing sport. Maria burned her girls' clothes when she was four and dressed as a boy, so she could enjoy activities boys got involved with. She competed as a weightlifter winning many competitions, till she was 13, and regularly beat up the boys in her area! Finally, she had to out herself when she had to present her birth certificate for a competition and soon after, took up squash. Through the years she faced many threats from the Taliban because as a woman she wasn't living as their traditions required. She now lives in Canada and is in the top 50 women in the world, being coached by a former champion. Her book about her life growing up, is called "A Different Kind of Daughter - the Girl Who Hid From the Taliban in Plain Sight.")

What about someone having a joke with friends? Is Moses talking about dressing as the opposite sex as a lifestyle choice, for fun, or short-term necessity for a few minutes/hours/days? The passage simply doesn't give enough information, and any theology based on this passage is simply not safe. There will be other situations you can think of that I haven't. Some of you will of course, say those situations are okay, but not for the Trans. By who's authority do you say they are okay, but for Trans situations it isn't?

¹⁶ See <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gay-christians-being-forced-out-by-evangelical-churches-7k7lxw0ln>

Some writers believe Moses was addressing the issue where certain Canaanite or Amalekite Gods had festivals and men dressed as women as part of the worship of the goddess, and other festivals where women dressed as men.

Folks who cling on to the idea that Deuteronomy 22: 5 is about Transgender people have quite a narrow perspective. We don't know exactly what Moses was writing about, and we can't ask him. Many of these situations and examples I've used we would probably applaud as justified and laudable, so aren't we guilty of applying our own Western standards and prejudices, and we choose to disapprove of the ones we don't like, and find distasteful?

If you endorse that particular law, the logic would be that if it is wrong, it is wrong in every situation, unless you know for certain what Moses was addressing – you can't pick and choose, because that is subjective prejudice.

In tackling this verse, Kathy Baldock, in a book review, argues the meaning is very different from what I have covered, and her article is well worth a read, because I can't easily summarize her review. Take a time out and read it here: <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-transgenderism-by-owen-strachan-and-gavin-peacock-a-book-review/>.

One more thing relating to that verse: we have many women in society and in the church wearing trousers, just as Scottish men and women can both wear kilts, and throughout much of Asia and China sarongs and other skirt-like garments are worn by men, especially ceremonially. The clothing at the time of Jesus¹⁷ involved an inner garment for both men and women made of two rectangles of cloth sewn together at the top and sides with gaps left for head and arms. Over this was an outer tunic or flowing robe held in place with a belt or girdle. It is likely the women's tunic would have been more decorative at the edges. Women wore an additional veil covering the head and upper body. Men and women's garments were largely very similar except for the veil, covering the head, but not the face.

In all these instances, the clothing is consistent with the culture, and it's relatively easy to make the point that trans folk are themselves dressing appropriately for who they are – they aren't pretending to be something they are not. The application of this verse therefore seems much more religious or cultural than anything else and is therefore irrelevant to us living now in the light of the Gospel of Grace.

To some degree this is confirmed with a reading of John Gill's 'Exposition of the Bible' in which he explains that various gods required their adherents to wear clothing appropriate to the god, so men would wear coloured "women's clothing" when worshipping Venus, and women wear garments like chain mail when worshipping Mars. The concern being that in both instances 'improper conduct' would result as part of the worship! You really don't need me to explain the euphemism 'improper conduct'!

¹⁷ <http://blog.adw.org/2017/03/sort-clothing-people-jesus-time-wear/>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_clothing and <https://theconversation.com/what-did-jesus-wear-90783>

If the Bible were truly taking a stand against transgender issues I would expect the theme or principles to be echoed many times throughout Scripture, and yet there is only this single disputed verse that is wide open to other interpretations and doesn't even get an auspicious place in the passage, being squeezed in between some verses about a fallen donkey and bird's nests on the ground. It doesn't inspire confidence in the seriousness in which Moses regarded it. In fact, I would go as far as to say Transgender people wasn't what Moses had in mind at all.

In the 'Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible' published in 1871¹⁸ the verse was described thus:

Though disguises were assumed at certain times in heathen temples, it is probable that a reference was made to unbecoming levities practised in common life. They were properly forbidden; for the adoption of the habiliments of the one sex by the other is an outrage on decency, obliterates the distinctions of nature by fostering softness and effeminacy in the man, impudence and boldness in the woman as well as levity and hypocrisy in both; and, in short, it opens the door to an influx of so many evils that all who wear the dress of another sex are pronounced "an abomination unto the Lord."

The Commentary is saying this verse is about people who are men remaining and identifying as men but dressing as a woman, and women remaining women, but who dress as a man. It therefore has nothing to do with somebody who is by nature one sex, but their physical appearance is the other sex. One must also be considerate of the fact that in 1871 the very idea of being transgender would never have been discussed in society. It would have been a situation only revealed behind locked doors, so the information today just wouldn't have been available then, so very few people could ever write about it with any credibility. I suspect that even the writers of the above commentary had no knowledge other than tittle-tattle and imagination, but I could be wrong. Additionally, the Biblical resources and lexicons we now have available are vastly superior to those that were available on the late 1800's.

Sticking with this verse slightly longer, I came across these comments about the verse, on the QueerTheology website (<http://www.queertheology.com/transgender-christian/>) which whilst being a bit simplistic, seems to include a certain amount of truth. (As a reminder, so that the first paragraph is understood, a transgender man is a man who was born female):

"This passage is found in the purity codes. One could make the argument that in these times the lines between "men's" and "women's" clothing is blurred to be pretty much meaningless. You could also make the argument that as a transgender man it would be against my nature to wear women's clothing and so therefore I am abiding by the command.

¹⁸ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown

You could also say that whatever gender you are, wearing clothing makes that clothing belong to your gender (hence a man who chooses to wear a skirt is wearing men's clothing because he is a man). You can do a lot with this one passage".

I accept that the tone of that sounds as if the writer is looking to "get around" a restriction, rather than face it head-on, but the writer is right in saying the Trans person is dressing according to their gender identity. It's just that a good number of folk refuse to recognise the person's gender identity for what it is. However, it also illustrates how tenuous and unclear the verse is, and that makes it very unsafe for building a theology based solely on that verse.

Finally, under this section you can make a valid point that the Holiness/Purity code realistically ceases to be effective, following the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes, starting in Romans 8: 1: -

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order 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.

The law of sin and death was the Old Testament law, which is effectively set aside and replaced by the law of the Spirit of life, which is honoured when we look not just at the words written, but at the spirit and attitude behind them. Hence, we can set aside the requirements of the law (and its liabilities), and not be obliged to follow them. That's not a "Get out of Jail - Free" card, because we have another obligation: that of taking the general tenor of the whole of scripture, examining what we understand God may have been saying and trying to get behind the reasons God set laws. We then try and follow the principles we learn. The Law as Jesus saw it in Mark 12 was "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these". These same commands were echoed by the Pharisee in Luke 10: 25-37 where Jesus responds by telling the story of the Good Samaritan.

The two most important laws don't come from the 10 Commandments but from Deuteronomy 6: 4-5 and Leviticus 19: 18

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3: 17: - "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom". Yes, we have freedom, but we must work out our "salvation with fear and trembling".

While talking about the Law, I want to draw attention to the Council of Jerusalem that took place in around AD50. This was to decide whether Gentile believers had

to be circumcised. However, it really goes a bit deeper, in that it effectively decided that the new believers were no longer bound by the Law, which, as Peter said was “a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear”. Read Acts 15: 1-29. The only conditions the Gentiles were asked to observe were given in a letter to the believers, saying:

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

Interestingly, a little later Paul writes to the Corinthians, because there is an issue over whether they could eat meat offered to idols. Paul indicated that there wasn't really a problem, but for the sake of the weaker brother/sister you should abstain from meat if it is an issue. It is described in 1 Corinthians 8:

⁶ ...for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. ⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. ⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

From these passages, we can conclude that we are not required to abide by the Law but are required to live in such a way as to give those around us no cause for concern or grounds for complaint about us. However, there are no grounds to cite this verse claiming to be the weaker brother solely to keep another brother/sister in chains to ease our own theological discomfort – that would be wholly against the spirit of Jesus..

Let's look at a few other passages starting with the one most frequently misquoted.

Genesis 1: 26-27: - *“²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, ... ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ³¹ ... and it was very good”.*

We are talking here about the Imago Dei – the image of God. If **both** ‘male and female’ are made in God’s image, that means that the biological gender is not what determines that we are made in His image – it is something else. After all, what gender is God, and what determines that? So, to read Genesis 1: 27 as a passage that conclusively proves that only male and female are possible expressions of the Imago Dei, is a complete failure to engage properly with Scripture.

My understanding of the passage is that it is written as poetry, and the key theology being taught is that we are created in God’s image – there is something of God in each of us, and this is affirmed twice in slightly different forms, then it concludes with a statement of what happened, not a definitive creational absolute.

The passage cannot be used as a proof-text to show that God created a binary gender system. Scripture teaches that God made woman for the man, and man for the woman. It was to be a way of procreation, commitment, and relationship. I have previously indicated this was God’s creation plan according to the Genesis story, which under the concept of Original Sin, became tainted by sin, and there is no way to put the genie back in the bottle. We are where we are, perhaps sadly, but this will all be put right when we get to heaven, where one’s gender and sexuality won’t matter a ha’porth, because Jesus says there will be no marriage or giving in marriage. Not sure about that? Look at Luke 20: 34-36: -

³⁴ *Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.*

³⁵ *But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.*

The point of gender is, at root, about procreation, and the expression of intimacy within a relationship, so in a situation where there is no marriage, or giving in marriage, the importance of what gender we have disappears, and is redundant. In fact, will our resurrection bodies need genitals? If they are not being used for love-making, then will we all have a different, similar shaped genitals in common, or maybe there will be no need at all for any type of organ? Will the food and drink in heaven be processed differently by our new bodies so no waste is generated? Who knows? I’m really making the point that gender only has any relevance while we are on Earth. In a sense, we get very exercised about the issue of gender and sex, and my gut feeling is that God is less bothered than we think about sexuality, since eternity is a long time and gender is only of any use during our lifetime. Seventy years out of eternity, is shorter than a heartbeat. I think what truly bothers God is our **behaviour** (love, respect, and honour) towards others, and whether we use and abuse other folks physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and yes, definitely sexually.

While we are looking at that Genesis 1 passage let me make another comment from a different angle. Many of us think of God as male, because we talk about God the Father. In fact, God, as I’m beginning to see it, doesn’t like this reference to maleness. In the Ten Commandments, He makes it clear, right at the beginning that we shouldn’t have any other gods and we shouldn’t make idols. Here in the

west we don't tend to make things out of wood and stone to worship, but we do make gods out of things in our mind – very much like folk did in the distant past, when they saw patterns of stars in the heavens that looked like gods to worship.

God says in Deuteronomy 4: 15-16: - *“Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, ¹⁶ so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman...”* So, we mustn't imagine or think of God as male (or female) since this is a human construct or distinction. Don't forget that passage in Genesis 1: 27 saying that God made male and female in his own image. If God was male, a female would not have been in His image as no human females had existed until this moment, hence God is neither male nor female – He is far above that. Further, if God was truly male, men would be “more” in His image than females, and the Bible is quite clear that both men and women are equally made in His image. (I'm not limiting the female aspect as being the physical shape, but everything that being female involves – maternal instincts, creativity, temperament, sensitivity and caring, insight – and that is for starters.) I believe the use of the male personal pronoun, is a limited language device to help us understand that God is someone with a personality, emotions, creativity, intellect, and feelings that we can relate to. Also, the Bible was written in a very patriarchal culture, so when God began to be revealed, stating there was to be no other god, it was natural to ascribe maleness to Yahweh. Of all the monotheistic religions, all have a male deity. There are many female deities, but they tend to be part of a polytheistic religion. Being male or female only has any relevance in the presence of a different gender. You cannot say God is a male God, or a female God when there is nothing to be compared with, because the other form doesn't exist. You would describe claret as a dark colour, but only when compared to another colour like yellow or white, but when compared only to black or purple you would say it was a light colour.

You may be uncomfortable about this bit, but what makes God male? We asked this question at the end of chapter 4, and it's time we answered it. Most folk who are particularly against Trans folk, take the simple line that if you are born with a penis you are a man and if you are born with a vagina, you are a woman. I'm not sure where the intersexed, fall into this rationale. So, what is God? He is not a being that needs to reproduce, or expel processed fluids, so, on those grounds He won't have genitals! The only way you can argue for a male God is in terms of character, but that is a bit flaky, because we have a reasonable percentage of women exhibiting male characteristics, but we don't define them as male! We also have men with feminine character traits – does that make them female? In our culture, of course not! In addition, there are many times when God is described demonstrating what we regard as female characteristics. Others will point to Jesus and say that Jesus said, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father', but this is quite shallow. Jesus wasn't specifically talking about His own physical body, but the totality of what He is like: character, judgement, love, compassion, intent, etc. In addition, Scripture uses other pictures for God for example: a shepherd (Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my Shepherd..”), a soldier (Exodus 15: 3 “The LORD is a warrior; the

LORD is his name"), a mother (Isaiah 66:13 - "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you"), fire (Deuteronomy 4: 36 - "From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire". Also remember the burning bush for Moses.) a lion (Isa. 31:4 - "As a lion growls, a great lion over its prey— and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamour— so the LORD Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights"), or a chicken (Matthew 23: 37 - "how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings". This is also feminine imagery.) but it is always clear that that the language is metaphorical. I'm sure there are other pictures out there, but those can get you started!

Just then I quoted Jesus saying, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'. This is not a definitive description of gender, but it was perfect for the culture Jesus was ministering to. There is no way Jesus would say 'He who has seen me has seen the Father, but guys, when you are writing your Gospels, make it clear for those living in the far future, that God also has a feminine aspect, and in fact can't really be characterised as any particular gender.' They wouldn't have been equipped to understand what Jesus was saying. It wasn't perfect, but it gets us started.

Most of us are unlikely to sculpt any image and call it God, but perhaps we are in danger of creating mental images. Do we imagine God as an animal, bird, fish, or star? Probably not, but do we picture God as a female or, more likely, a male? When we think of Jesus, how many of us get the image of him by Holman Hunt, or Leonardo da Vinci, or some other artist?

You will hear many Christians strongly argue that God is a male, but Deuteronomy 4:16 warns us against this (*do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether **formed like a man** or a woman*). I believe God is made complete by being wholly masculine and wholly feminine, because by creating men and women, both are then created according to His image. Many straight men exhibit some feminine traits, and vice versa, so, controversially maybe these folks, and LGBTQ+ folk, are reflecting more aspects of God's image than the macho man! That should open a nice can of worms!

We got a bit side-tracked there, so let's get back 'on topic' where we were talking about gender and sex. On what used to be called, the Gay Christian Network, another argument is espoused when talking about heterosexual sex and procreation:

*But does that mean that using our bodies in any other way is sinful?
God designed our ears and mouths so we could communicate - we listen, and we talk. Every culture on earth communicates this way. But some people are deaf, maybe because they were born that way or maybe because of something that happened to them. Either way, they can't communicate the way the rest of us do, so they have to improvise with what they have. Most deaf people today use sign language to*

communicate, and even though that's not what our hands were designed for, it gets the job done. None of us would call that "sinful".

The argument that "you shouldn't do that because that wasn't God's design" is really more of an excuse than a real argument. If anything becomes sinful just because it wasn't part of the original design of creation, we'd have to condemn wheelchairs, makeup, open-heart surgery, bicycles, acrobatics, pre-packaged foods... well, you get the idea.

This was part of a discussion between two writers about the issue of whether God blesses same-sex marriages, and this was an extract of a piece by Justin Lee. I have placed a copy of the full article in Dropbox [here](#). The article is no longer available as the organisation are now known as the Q Christian Fellowship, and previous material has not been brought over to the new site.

Galatians 3: 26-28: - *"²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God **through faith**, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ **There is** neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, **neither male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* [My emphasis]

I referred to this passage a short while back saying we would look at it. This passage is hugely significant, because Paul is saying that through our baptism into Christ, as far as our relationship with God is concerned, gender just doesn't matter. That is massive! Can you see that? The ramifications are huge. In addition, if we have a faith in God, whether we are straight, gay/lesbian or trans we are all children of God.

Deuteronomy 23: 1: - *He who is wounded in the testicles, or has been made a eunuch, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord. (Amplified version).*

This clearly isn't directly about Trans because the first male to female operation didn't occur till 1930 in Germany. However, it is reflecting the general worldview of the time. The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge notes:

"It is evident that his law was not meant to exclude such Israelites either from the common benefits of civil society, or any essential religious advantages; but merely to lay them under a disgraceful distinction. This would tend to discourage parents from thus treating their children; a practice which was exceedingly common in those ages and countries. To this they were induced by the custom which prevailed, of employing such in the houses of the great and the courts of princes; so that they often rose to the highest posts of honour and authority."

Moses message was that God was trying to set a high standard for purity, by barring anyone with defects from entering the tabernacle. In its day that was very tough on those who were effectively victims of castration, as they couldn't help it, but the point of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was to enable all to come to him, not

to be bound by a law that excluded certain people, and to my mind, that thinking applies across the LGBTQ+ spectrum as well.

Even though the verse talks about being “wounded in the testicles, or has been made a eunuch” (the ESV says: “testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off”) this passage isn’t directly concerned with Transgender, because at the time Transgenderism wasn’t recognised in the way we do today. Hence in Moses’ day, they would have probably just had to keep very quiet and live with it, or perhaps live on the edges of society, being bullied and victimised. Instead, the passage relates to those accidentally or deliberately made a eunuch. So, to quote this verse in the discussion around Trans*ism is to compare apples with pears. Even the principles are irreconcilable, and very different.

Please note that no-where in Scripture does it say it is wrong to make someone a eunuch, neither does it say that God’s Holy Temple (our bodies) has been desecrated, by being made a eunuch. Sometimes a eunuch had his testicles cut out, and a few cultures removed the penis as well. I would bet that today a good number of Christian men have had vasectomies: have they been guilty of desecrating God’s Temple? They cannot have children (the standard Biblical measure of God’s blessing), unless the surgery is reversed, and even then, it is not a given. If you argue this verse is still valid, you MUST insist Christians can’t have vasectomies. Sorry, you can’t have it both ways.

The next three passages are to do with eunuchs. Eunuchs are not specifically transgender, but through the ages, some transgender folk may have become eunuchs. Down through history, eunuchs are people who are unable to fully function as true members of their original gender, usually through no choice of their own. There is a very good and much fuller examination of these passages on the whosoever.org website. I strongly recommend you view: <https://whosoever.org/transsexual-theology/>. I would go further and say that exploring the site is helpful as the tone of the site lacks the rancour and invective of many who have been so badly hurt by churches. The site address is: <https://whosoever.org>.

I will deal with the next three passages in one go rather than individually.

Isaiah 56: 3-5: - ³ *Let no foreigners **who have bound themselves to the LORD** say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people”. And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree”. ⁴ For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant-- ⁵ to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever”.*

Matthew 19: 12: - “... For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it”.

Acts 8: 35-38, but you could begin at verse 26: - ³⁵ *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.* ³⁶ *As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"* (Some versions do not include v37) ³⁷ *Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'* *The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'* ³⁸ *And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*

Wow! You've probably read those passages a hundred times, but the significance is almost a game-changer! In the Matthew passage, Jesus talks about "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', ..." He goes on to say towards the end of the dialogue "some are eunuchs because they were born that way" so is clearly accepting that things go wrong before birth in the way people are made. Jesus is saying that God allowed individuals to be born as eunuchs and eunuchs clearly do not fit into the two categories of male or female. To make a reasonable extrapolation, Jesus is clearly recognising that people like hermaphrodites, trans, eunuchs, and presumably other conditions can and were occurring. (We already know that Jesus recognised birth defects occur because of the story of the man born blind told in John 9.) Meanwhile, Isaiah is making a huge declaration to eunuchs who keep Gods Sabbaths, and who choose what pleases Him and hold fast to His covenant: These faithful folks will be given a name better than sons or daughters, a name that lasts forever. That's a special affirmation.

I wonder if it is significant that when Jesus clears the Temple (In Matthew 21; Mark 11; and Luke 19) he uses the phrase 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' a quote from verse 7 of the same chapter in Isaiah ("... my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."). Clearly, he was very familiar with the passage dealing with eunuchs and foreigners, and this is two verses after speaking of the blessings pronounced by God on eunuchs.

Then you get Philip baptising a eunuch who had come to faith. I'd love to copy and paste the bulk of that first whosoever.org web page, but you really must do the work yourself!

Romans 12: 2: - *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will".*

I have quoted this verse because it is used by those saying Trans folk simply have an emotional or psychological problem and need to allow God to transform their minds. It's a similar concept to someone retorting: "Oh, come on, snap out of it!" To quote a verse like this is dreadful and could leave the person in a worse state than they started in. I will explain: many people have had a serious illness or disability where they have asked for prayer. On rare occasions God has healed, but usually not. To use a verse like this seems to be more about the Christian being able to say, "I've told them what to do, it's up to them, but I've done my bit".

These Christians really don't want to get too involved. They don't want to get their hands dirty and instead keep the trans person at a distance.

Later on, when addressing the issue of praying for the healing of a lesbian or gay person I want to explore this next issue more, but to get your mind working, how many "staggering miracles" – life-changing in every sense, real, major answers to prayer have you personally witnessed? Miracles that stand up to close scrutiny. I'm not talking about asking God to give you a spouse, or a job in another country, although those are life-changing. I'm looking here at something impossible in our normal area of experience, blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, someone with severe learning difficulties having their mind healed so they can now be described as neuro-typical and can live a "normal" life. Something like Abraham and Sarah becoming parents beyond child-bearing years. I have seen two, perhaps three miracles throughout my life, which could have been verified at the time, though as the folks involved are now long deceased, my comments are nothing more than that, comments, which are now unverifiable! I have seen many other "answers to prayer" but that is different, and I'm not giving any wriggle-room on this, because it's important. A Trans person being healed of their gender dysphoria, would be a miracle of this magnitude, so how confident are you that your prayer for their healing (if sought) will be truly answered in an unambiguous and utterly verifiable fashion? What are the implications for the person if the prayer isn't answered? Are you truly going to insist on them praying until it happens, when you aren't the one suffering? As I've made clear, many people through my early years prayed for my healing from asthma. I still have it, though I'm the wrong side of sixty, albeit the condition is in a much-reduced fashion. Why didn't God answer those prayers? I believe I have a clue – it's not definitive, but that's for me to know and you to wonder about. Because it is totally subjective and personal, I'm not writing it here, though. The people insisting the trans person keeps praying for healing really have no price to pay – it costs them nothing, while costing the trans person everything on a daily basis. It is therefore sinful for the Christian to make these comments.

Perhaps it's the right place to include an article that appeared on Premier Christianity in November 2015. It is by Andrew & Rachel Wilson and entitled "Why hasn't God healed me?"

So many people ask this question – and as a pastor of a charismatic church, I'm asked it a lot.

As the father of two autistic children I also wonder why they haven't been healed.

Yet I know of only two half-decent answers. One: we don't know. Two: one day, he will heal.

Despite the way we sometimes think about it, there are four different ways in which God heals people:

1) Healing bodies

Every second, as my heart beats, tiny bits of mineral and organic material are sent to parts of the body that need it, performing ongoing repairs that will never finish, like painting the Forth Bridge, hour after hour, year after year. My body is being healed all the time, and it's a result of the grace of the God who created me, searches me, knows me and loves me that he has designed a body that functions that way.

2) Healing breakthrough

In August, at the Newday youth event, I had the privilege of interviewing people who had been physically healed during one of the meetings. Over 250 responded, and I spoke to several whose stories were both immediate and dramatic, as well as hearing from those who had been healed in previous years, and were still gleefully free of symptoms. 'Greater works than these will [you] do, because I am going to the Father' (John 14:12, ESV).

3) Healing skills

When I was 11 I was in a terrible car crash, and would have died, if it had not been for the God-given skills of other human beings. The building of the local hospital, the ambulance that got me there before I died from blood loss, the image of God in the paramedics that made them give their lives to rescuing people they've never met, the wisdom of the surgeon, the intelligence and skill of the thousands of individuals whose discoveries have made operating theatres and anaesthesia possible – all of these are gracious gifts of a loving God, whose mercy enables healings to take place across the world that would, in any other generation, be considered quite miraculous.

4) A healing future

A trumpet sounds, and the dead are raised in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, never to perish again (1 Corinthians 15:52). Physical bodies become incorruptible, spiritual, glorious, powerful; no sickness or affliction will ever befall them again. Cholera and cancer are consigned to the cosmic skip for all eternity. Every deaf ear is unblocked, every damaged limb is made whole, every blind eye sees. Autism and Down's syndrome and schizophrenia and Alzheimer's are swallowed up in victory. And 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:26).

So we pray for healing. We believe God can heal our children. And we trust him when he doesn't, knowing that one day, he will.

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Why-hasn-t-God-healed-me>

I don't need to add anything to that, so let's move on.

1 Samuel 16: 7: - *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. **People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**"*

This was when Samuel met the family of Jesse to pick a son of his to become king of Israel. It is a very significant passage. Again, it seems to be downplaying the standards that humans feel are important and focussing on what is going on inside. Jesus echoes this comment when he is telling off the Pharisees for their inconsistency. They would allow a boy to be circumcised on the Sabbath, but not allow anyone to be healed. Jesus says in John 7: 24: - **"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."** So don't judge a Trans person by what they look like, but what they are like inside—they may be more Godly than me, though that may be a low bar!

The theology in the next few pages, applies not just to the Trans, but to the whole LGBTQ+ community. One really familiar passage deserves perhaps an unexpected mention. It is John 3: 16-18: -

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ **Whoever believes in him is not condemned...** [Emphasis mine.]

Did you catch that? **Whoever** believes in Him is saved? Don't also forget the verses in John 1: 12-13:

¹² Yet **to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God** - ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. [Emphasis mine.]

And one more verse in John needs inclusion here, and I'm grateful to John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress (in the early part of 'The Second Stage' where Pilgrim talks with Interpreter) for reminding me. Take a look at John 6: 37: -

³⁷ **All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.** [Emphasis mine.]

So, the idea of unconditional salvation is echoed many times in those early chapters of John. In fact, the word 'whoever' appears 7-times, and the word 'everyone' appears 4-times in John 3. The salvation-inclusive verses are: 15, 16, 18, 21, 33 & 36. They are tremendous and liberating – which is what the Gospel **should** be! Likewise, don't forget the verse in Joel 2: 32: **"And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved"** echoed by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2: 21). This 'whoever' / 'everyone' / 'to all' is unconditional – unconditional other than having a basic belief in Jesus. We can also refer to Zechariah 3, which is referring to the High Priest called Joshua, but it is clear from the rest of the chapter that this is a picture not just of Joshua, but of each one of us who was a sinner, but who has sought mercy at the cross:

³ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "**See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.**"

⁵ Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by. [Emphasis mine.]

How about another couple of Old Testament passages, the first being David in Psalm 34: 22, where he writes:

*The Lord will rescue his servants;
no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.*

Then the prophet Isaiah writes in chapter 55:

¹ "Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

And talking of the wicked (that's me and you, not others), he says:

^{7b} *Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon. [Emphasis mine.]*

Once again, note it is unconditional.

Now turn to another Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk. In chapter 2: 4, he writes:

"... but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness"

That word 'faithfulness' can also be translated as 'faith' according to the footnote in that passage. It is reminiscent of the passage in Ephesians 2 which says:

⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Once again that word 'faith' can also be translated as 'faithfulness'. In both instances it is the Greek word *Pistos*. Some suggest that the verse is better expressed as: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faithfulness* (in this instance the faithfulness of Christ, as this makes more sense.). Let's not get side-tracked though!

That expression in verse 8, "by grace you have been saved" is a repeat of the same phrase in verse 5 of that chapter, so, because it is repeated so soon afterwards, we know it is a key verse, and we shouldn't ignore it. Have I made my point yet?

Every Christian, whether straight or LGBTQ+ is the same in the sight of God. Every one of us is forgiven and given new 'fine garments' to wear.

While we are looking at the words of Jesus, remember what he said when the rich young man came to Jesus to find out about how he could be saved. In Matthew 19: 17-19, we read:

¹⁷ *“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”*

¹⁸ *“Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

Then again, in Matthew 22: 36-40 when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, he reiterates those he regards as the most important: -

³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**” [My emphasis]*

The interesting thing here is that Jesus is asked, in the Matthew 19 passage, how someone can be saved. Nowhere here does he say that sexual orientation or anything else precludes salvation, so if anyone who identifies themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community comes to faith in Jesus, they WILL be saved – no different to anyone else. Scripture itself shows there is no doubt, and no room for doubt. Whenever a person comes to faith, it is demonstrated over time in that it outworks itself in acts of love, respect, honour, honesty and concern for those around them.

Although I am majoring on the faith/faithfulness element, it is not a passive thing. In those verses we have just read Jesus expects that faith to be worked out as we love God (an action toward God) and love others (an action towards others). That idea of faith resulting in action is followed up by James in chapter 2: 15-17:

¹⁵ *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Micah echoes this in one of the key verses in the Bible - chapter 6: 8:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This doesn't make faith conditional, but where faith is present, Godly actions towards others will result. But that is not the trap-door to say that because someone has come to faith, their orientation must change. It can't, so get over it.

To make it clear, sin is usually an act that harms, or threatens to harm, someone else or their interests, directly or indirectly; or harms, or threatens to harm, the perpetrator and their relationship with God. Frequently, our minds think very

ungodly thoughts which never translate to deeds, so in this context, we need to bring not just our actions, but the thoughts and imaginings of our minds, and measure it against that scriptural plumb line. That way, we can determine whether they are either right or wrong. Hence, it isn't hard to see how the whole law can be summed up in those commandments that Jesus mentions. Clearly if our behaviour is in line with the Spirit of God, as it builds others up, and/or also builds up our relationship with God, so, it cannot be sin.

Let's turn to Paul. He's normally regarded as the New Testament justifier of non-affirming anti-homosexual attitudes. However, he writes in Romans 3:

*²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ **to all who believe**. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** ²⁴ **and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood— **to be received by faith**. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [Emphasis mine]*

Paul again writes in Colossians 2: 9-14: -

*⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,** ¹⁴ **having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.***

Paul also wrote another crystal-clear statement we all know well, in Romans 10:

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Once again, notice it is totally unconditional. Christ's death made it possible for us to be permanently reconciled to God, and there are no conditions other than believe Jesus was raised from death. Another place Paul uses unconditional language is in Romans 1: 16, where he says that God "brings salvation to everyone who believes".

In his daily Bible Reading notes based on My Utmost for His Highest, Oswald Chambers quotes from Isaiah 45:22, which says: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."

He goes on to write:

Many of us have a mental picture of what a Christian should be, and looking at this image in other Christians' lives becomes a hindrance to our focusing on God. This is not salvation—it is not simple enough. He says, in effect, "Look to Me and you are saved," not "You will be saved someday." We will find what we are looking for if we will concentrate on Him. We get distracted from God and irritable with Him while He continues to say to us, "Look to Me, and be saved ..." Our difficulties, our trials, and our worries about tomorrow all vanish when we look to God.

Wake yourself up and look to God. Build your hope on Him. No matter how many things seem to be pressing in on you, be determined to push them aside and look to Him. "Look to Me ..." Salvation is yours the moment you look.

Coming back to the words of Jesus, he is reported as saying in Matthew 7: 16: "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" And there is a similar phrase four verses later in verse 20. Jesus says we should watch people, and see what fruit is produced. Then if good fruit is produced, **we** would be guilty of sin if we did anything other than celebrate it.

So, if you insist being Trans is a sin, if they are saved, how can I turn them away from a church made up of other sinners? I know I will continue to sin until I die, but I live under the promise that my sins are washed away. You will of course remember that Paul writes in Romans 7: -

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

Hence if we claim that applies to us as well, knowing we will always continue to sin [and we'll be in good company with Paul], and yet believe Trans is a choice and therefore a sin, are we not guilty of awful hypocrisy? And if, in God's eyes, being Transgender is not a choice, our sin is so much greater, because you can then add false accusations, hostility, spite, lack of hospitality, rejection, a lack of love, and many more! Please don't forget how serious the failing to be hospitable is regarded in the Old Testament – God's judgement falls on those who are guilty of this sin. Remember this was the sin of Sodom, not homosexuality—but we'll look closely at that story when we look at homosexuality in due course.

Should the reader remain convinced that being a Trans is a sin, how are you any better? You too are a sinner saved by grace – you are not yet without sin. God isn't worried about the scale of sin but sin itself. Amongst my many sins, at the minor end of the scale I once stole a small plastic model soldier from a schoolmate

when I was a child. Did that sin separate me from God any less than a Harold Shipman? Of course not! There is no gradation to being separated – you are either joined with God or separated from Him – this is a truly binary situation!

I hope you remember the passage from James 2:10-11: -

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Then, in the next chapter, James writes in verses 2, 9-10: -

² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

Clearly James has his tongue in his cheek when he talks about those who are "never at fault in what they say" because he knows full well no-one is perfect.

Now let's follow up on that "serial killer" idea and make one more related argument: Over the years, I have read a good number of Christian tracts trying to convince a person to become a Christian where the seeker says that God could never forgive them for the things they have done wrong. The Christian then confidently makes the argument that if Adolf Hitler had repented, God would have forgiven him. Obviously, that's true, as we read in the John 3: 16 passage, about 'whoever' believes.

Let's use a more recent example: Jeffrey Dahmer also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal, was an American serial killer and sex offender, who committed the rape, murder and dismemberment of seventeen men and boys between 1978 and 1991, with many of his later murders also involving necrophilia, cannibalism and the permanent preservation of body parts—typically all or part of the skeletal structure. (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Dahmer) In the 2017 American "On Demand" series televised by Oxygen, called *Dahmer On Dahmer A Serial Killer Speaks*, they report that while in prison, in May 1994, he was baptized, having earlier, reportedly, become a Christian. The archive footage shows Dahmer talking about his conversion, and whilst it is quite possible he was genuine, I wonder whether it was part of his idea of controlling what happened around him. Anyway, I'm not the judge, and I'll leave that up to Him. The programme was a 2-episode series of face to face interviews principally with Dahmer but also others caught up in the crimes. (He was subsequently bludgeoned to death with a barbell in November of that same year by a fellow-inmate.)

Conceivably it appears Jeffrey Dahmer might be embraced as a fellow Christian despite his horrendous crimes, and yet, it seems many Christians would say that the Trans and the Gay are condemned to Hell, regardless of the fact they may have

accepted Christ as Saviour, be living for Jesus, exercising spiritual gifts, and having only blessed those around them. I suggest someone has gotten their theology in a fankle.

I mentioned our sin separates us from God. If I am separated from God by stealing a plastic toy, or am separated from God because of a murder, the result is the same: I am separated from God. It doesn't matter how minor or serious the offence. We need to get things in perspective. Let's say for sake of argument that being trans *is* a sin, what about your anger, your gossip, your criticism, or any other sins you regularly commit? Being Trans (or gay, for that matter) isn't the 'unforgivable sin', whatever you may be tempted to think, and I'm convinced that it isn't even a sin.

Now let's be practical and look at a hypothetical situation, which as far as I am aware, hasn't happened, but theoretically may have done: Suppose a Trans person fully accepts Christ as Saviour during their transition, and they go on to be filled with the Holy Spirit in a clear and apparent fashion, and to all intents and purposes are "on fire for the Lord." Should we expect them to cease their transition from one gender to the other? For a while, I thought that ideally, yes, but now, I would definitely say, no. Experience and what we have already said, strongly cautions against it. Once again, God is sovereign, and has the power to heal in every situation, but does He answer every prayer for healing with a "Yes", this side of Glory? You know the answer to that, is an unequivocal "No." Sorry, in this situation, it simply isn't good enough to say, "wait a bit (or, wait a bit longer) to see if God heals." Some elements of the treatment may be time-sensitive, and the most gracious and Godly thing to do, would be to show you are prepared to stand with the person through the change, however distasteful it may seem to be to you. Although I have witnessed miracles, I have also witnessed a couple of occasions where someone was temporarily healed, only for their condition to return a short time later. That's a tough one to explain. I tend to be cautious, and some may criticise me for a lack of faith, but I'll happily "Praise God" for anything verifiable. From that perspective, I would still encourage the trans person to continue with their treatment, if that is what they want. Any gender change undertaken, won't stop God from being able to use that person fully in the future. God is Sovereign as we said just now.

Previously, I mentioned my own lack of healing. On one occasion, when I was around 10 or 11, I think, I was told by someone with an internationally renowned healing ministry that my lack of healing was due to a lack of faith. (Fortunately, I disbelieved him, and lost any respect I had for him.) However, Jesus healed someone who lacked faith (Mark 9: 23-24). Telling someone they haven't been healed due to a lack of faith can be incredibly damaging, so don't do it, don't even be tempted. In modern parlance, and if I were not a child at the time, thinking back, I would have wanted to "lamp" him for his arrogance. If I had, I wonder if God would have healed him, or would he have let the bruises heal over time! Ok, that's a bit melodramatic, but it makes a point, and I was quite young and wanted to cry and rage.). God hasn't removed my asthma and eczema in spite of a good

many spiritual highs and lows – time of closeness to God and times of distance. As with most Asthmatics who have a tight chest and can't breathe properly at times, if there were a medical treatment that would remove the condition completely, I would have certainly bitten off your hand to breathe freely. I have been unwillingly forced to accept my "thorn in the flesh". "Unwillingly" in the sense that if I could do something to get rid of the conditions, I would, but as I have no options, I take what Medicine makes available, and have learned to be content and live with it.

One line that has been used to reinforce the stance against accepting Trans folk is that we as God's children need to view our bodies as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. I agree, we DO need to view our bodies as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

However, the line taken was that as our bodies are not our own, people should not choose to change gender because God made the Temple as it is and any change ignores the sanctity of the temple. The argument sounds quite reasonable, but I have a real problem with that stance. It is based on what I have already shown I believe to be false, that the decision to change gender is based on an arbitrary decision, like "I think I fancy having a different hairstyle, because it'll make me feel good about myself." It denies the underlying psyche of the person, and the fact that along with all the other genetic conditions one can receive at birth, that this is something lifelong, and hard-wired into the person's persona even if the biology seems 'clear' to someone else.

Another problem with the line about our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit, is that all the other things that can harm our bodies: smoking, overeating, failure to exercise, weakness for chocolate, using sugar or too much salt, drinking certain fizzy drinks with their high sugar contents, fast food, bacon, and many other things; don't result in exclusion from being part of a church. We have already made the point about the theoretical transgender person who has completed the process and has become fully man or woman, then coming to a church and asking for membership. The church may be entirely unaware of their background, and this shows the weakness of the position.

In the past, the church tended to treat those with Gender Identity Disorder with wariness, suspicion, and hope that they go away, so we don't have to deal with it. I hope the church in this country will start to examine the issues thoroughly, not looking for ways we can exclude folks but to see how we can welcome them into our fellowships and give these people who have received such a tough time, encouragement and help, to grow closer to their Lord. In churches where Membership is something needing to be applied for, it should be offered to the Trans on the same basis as anyone else, with no special/unusual requirements. There must be no distinction.

We must be welcoming to all. Don't forget James chapter 2:

"² Suppose someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor person in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the one who is poor, "You

stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,”⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”

I think when all is said and done, the passage we often use at Communion needs to be highlighted, and that is 1 Corinthians 11:

“²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

Notice that **examine themselves**, not examine others! Each is responsible for coming before God and facing him eye to eye, for their own sin. The trans believer looks God in the face, in the same way as I. Have I sinned? Yes, that is why I’m here.

My conclusion as we approach the end of this section is that the key issue is that we believe that “whoever believes in [Jesus] shall not perish but have eternal life,” so what right have we got to make up rules to exclude folks with a gender issue – especially when it is outside their control. I would also like to add a couple of other passages from Ephesians.

Ephesians 1: 13-14: -

*¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,**¹⁴ **who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.*

And Ephesians 2: 8-9: -

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

If an LGBTQ+, or a Trans person in this instance, has believed in Jesus for salvation, there are some pretty strong words spoken about their relationship with Christ and Father God: saved by Grace as a gift of God and marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit to guarantee their inheritance. Do you really want to go against all that?

The key question is: is a person saved, and are they living each day for their Lord as best they can? The Bible and our Lord actually welcome them with open arms, so why can’t you? Why exclude them from a membership which is a purely man-made institution that has no real Biblical sanction anyway?

Fortunately, in some parts of the church, attitudes are changing, and for this I thank God. Although progress is being made, it is very patchy and mixed. There is a long way to go. As we’ve gone along we have referred to young trans folk, but how do we as Disciples of Christ treat them? I’ll quote a few paragraphs from a Premier.org.uk article (whom I use quite a lot as a resource throughout this essay, because of their fairly measured editorial style that tends not to be too

judgemental), but the full text is worth a proper look. Although I called Premier 'quite measured' editorially just now, I must heavily criticise the slowness to apply "Moderation" to certain comments made after such articles, because the "Moderation" hasn't matched the quality of the initial journalism, waiting too long before deleting offensive comments.

The article quoted from below is written by someone born as a man who transitioned to woman. The article is sensitive and well balanced, but sadly some of the comments below it fall far below the standard Jesus requires. There are some generally positive comments, though I'm pleased to see that at the time I write this, Moderators have deleted some comments, because in my view this doesn't happen often enough. I've been saddened and sickened by a few of the supposedly more 'Bible-based' responses to many reports on LGBTQ+ issues on the site, because of their lack of love, though I'm heartened by some of the others. The full article can be found at: <http://www.premier.org.uk/Topics/Life/Sex-Relationships/Supporting-transgender-teenagers>. The writer says:

Transitioning from one gender to another, for me to have become Rachel, was a journey into truth and authenticity. It was being born again. Indeed, for me, it was a prelude to that incredible experience of being 'born again from above in Christ'. As such, I argue that if all life is sacred, we need to acknowledge that young trans people's commitment to becoming their true selves is sacred. It's holy ground. So please tread carefully.

One of the things I've said repeatedly to people of all ages considering transitioning from one gender to another is this: do not imagine it is the answer to all your problems. I've said this most often to younger people, I hope not in a patronising way, but as one who still remembers how 'black and white' the world can seem when we're 15. A sensitive, loving friend will come alongside young trans people, helping them to discern a path and get appropriate medical support, but also to avoid losing sight of the wider world and God's invitation to enjoy and play our part in creation.

But let's be clear. If transitioning and gender reassignment are not the answer to everything, **they present an opportunity for young trans people to have the life that many non-trans people take for granted.** We live in a world in which the attempted suicide rates for trans people are ten times higher than for non-trans people. That, as I've experienced it, is not the result of trans people being 'mess-ups', but because we live in a society and culture that remains extraordinarily prejudiced against trans people and makes us feel we have to bottle up and hide who we actually are.

Jesus said: 'Stay with me. Watch and pray.' Yet the disciples could not stay awake. Often what young trans people want most is people who can stay awake with them, alert to the demands and challenges of a

prejudiced and challenging world. Hey, that's actually what most young people want, isn't it? That and the chance to be supported into finding their way into an increasingly complex and strange world so that they can live, delight and flourish.

There are things I'm tempted to comment on, but that would detract from that last paragraph, and that is a good place to finish this section and move on to the next issue.

Additional Resources.

As one might expect there are fewer websites dealing solely with being a Trans Christian when compared with those dealing with being a Lesbian or Gay Christian, but many of the latter also deal with other parts of the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and frequently include LGBTQ+ theology. The sites below are, in the main, Trans centric, and there is a fuller list at the end of the document. Anyway, here are a few resources and sites worth exploring:

- “The New Woman” by Charity Norman. First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Allen & Unwin. Paperback ISBN 978 1 74331 875 1. E-book ISBN 978 1 92526 671 9. Charity Norman volunteered for several years on the New Zealand Lifelines helpline, where she encountered many transgender people as part of her work. This novel grew from the stories she heard from people she spoke to on that helpline. This book received enthusiastic praise despite it’s difficult subject matter when Charity Norman appeared on Simon Mayo’s “Drivetime” Book Club. I cannot recommend this highly enough, because it presents a real-life context and scenario for someone struggling with gender dysphoria, not just portraying the doubts and fears of being in a situation they can’t control, but describing the very real reactions of family and friends. This is a brilliant introduction to the issues if you have never come across gender dysphoria - a must read! It has no theological angle though there is one passage that gets very close to presenting a beautiful picture of Christ.
- If you haven’t seen it, watch the film *The Danish Girl* starring Eddie Redmayne. Not perfect, but very helpful.
- MindLine Trans+ 0300 330 5468, based in Bristol, but they are “a national helpline, you can call us from anywhere in the UK”. <https://bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-support/mindline-transplus/>. “The MindLine Trans+ provides a safe place to talk about your feelings confidentially. We don’t record calls nor ask for any personal details. Our listeners will try understand the multitude of feelings and concerns that may be going on for you. We are here to listen and offer our support.”
- For any US friends: Trans Lifeline (<https://www.translifeline.org/>) is a trans-led organization that connects trans people to the community, support, and resources they need to survive and thrive. Available 7am-1am PST / 9am-3am CST / 10am-4am EST. Call 877-565-8860.

If you know of a reputable UK or European helpline, please contact me.

- <http://www.transcentralpa.org/resources.cfm> TransCentralPA is an American-based company committed to providing advocacy and caring support for transgender individuals, their significant others, families, friends and allies. TransCentralPA also provides gender education and information to businesses, organizations, educational institutions and governmental agencies.

- <http://www.bibleandhomosexuality.org/what-does-the-bible-say-about-transgender-people/> Rev'd Dr Jonathan Tallon is a New Testament lecturer and early Church researcher, who is the host of an excellent website exploring the LGBTQ+ issues and I recommend you spend time reading through his material, especially if you have questions.
- <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/> TLPI are a non-profit organization American-based company dedicated to engaging in effective advocacy for transgender people in society. The TLPI brings experts and advocates together to work on law and policy initiatives designed to advance transgender equality.
- <http://www.chicagonow.com/trans-girl-cross> This is a site well worth spending some time reading. There are some problems with this site in Europe since the GDPR legislation, but you can view it if you use a VPN attached to a server in the US.
- <https://whosoever.org/> Founded in 1996 and respected by many major figures within the LGBTQ+ community. There is a wealth of good materials on the site which was relaunched around Christmas 2019. Please go and explore their material, which I highly commend, because it is produced in a professional and educated manner.
- <http://religiondispatches.org/transgender-and-christian-finding-identity/> This is now an archive website, but still worth checking out. The current 'live' site is <https://rewire.news/primary-topic/lgbtq/>
- <http://www.transfaithonline.org/> I haven't had a chance to read too much, but it seems to be well laid out. It isn't a Christian focussed site but directed at people of any faith, so be aware.
- <https://www.qchristian.org/> They say: "We are a diverse community with varied backgrounds, cultures, theologies and denominations, drawn together through our love of Christ and our belief that every person is a beloved child of God."
- <http://queergrace.com/> An online encyclopaedia for LGBTQ and Christian life
- <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/truth-about-trans> This is a helpful background piece on Trans and Trans attitudes.
- And a fun one to finish with. Consider the Kobudai fish which can change gender as shown on the BBC series "Blue Planet 2". If changing genders is so very wrong, why did God create this fish?!
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2gCkNYpCZVSZTpr5tsqlfjn/filming-fish-that-change-sex>

– Chapter 7 –

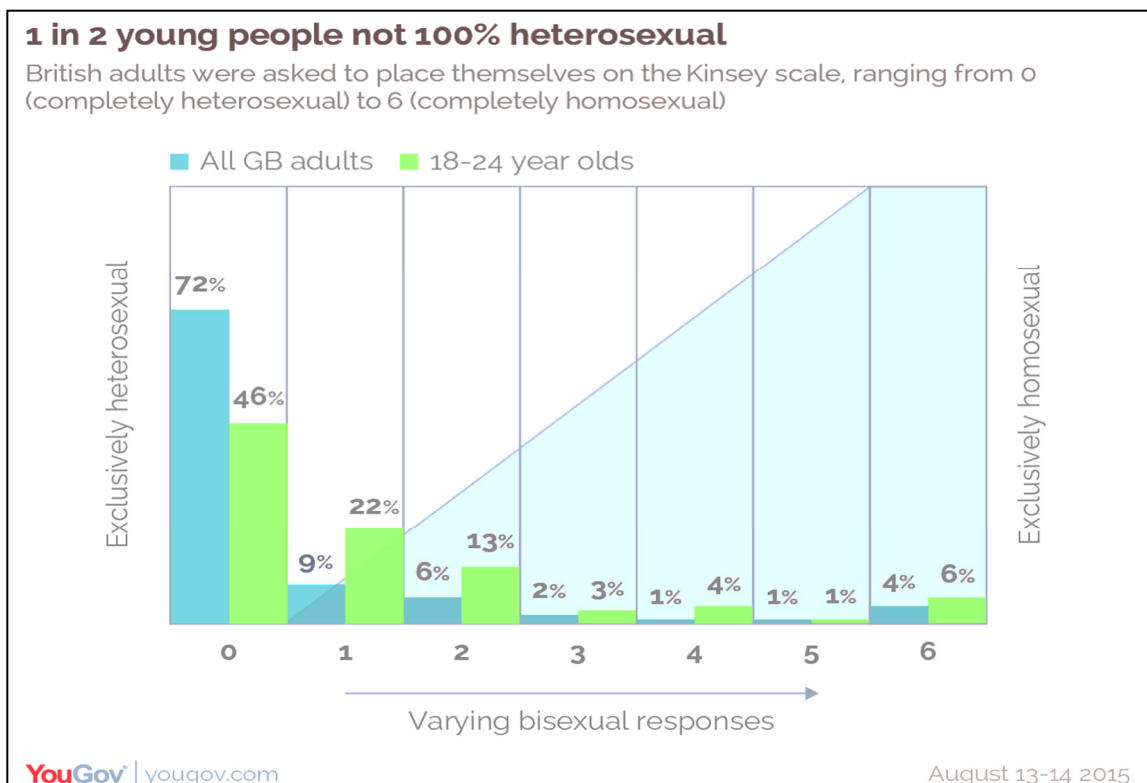
Being Gay or Lesbian, and being a Christian – the groundwork

“In his 1948 book, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, Alfred Kinsey shocked the world by announcing that 10% of the male population is gay. A 1993 Janus Report estimated that nine percent of men and five percent of women had more than “occasional” homosexual relationships”. So wrote the Gallop website in 2002. 19

The statistics are always debateable, but it is generally considered that 6% is a safe guess for those considered to be part of the LGBTQ+ community, the figure in the UK for those being Gay, Lesbian or Bi- is officially 2.2% (in 2018), according to the Office for National Statistics. One of the suggestions for the low figure quoted by the ONS, is that many still feel the stigma of officially labelling themselves as gay or lesbian. However, according to the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB - <http://www.indiana.edu/~nss/>), they report that: *“While about 7% of adult women and 8% of men identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, the proportion of individuals in the U.S. who have had same-gender sexual interactions at some point in their lives is higher.”* Although the figures differ, they are not wildly different.

Let me here interject some information from YouGov:

Invented by Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s, the Kinsey scale plots individuals on a range of sexual dispositions from exclusively heterosexual at 0 through to exclusively homosexual at 6. Where the



¹⁹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/6961/what-percentage-population-gay.aspx>

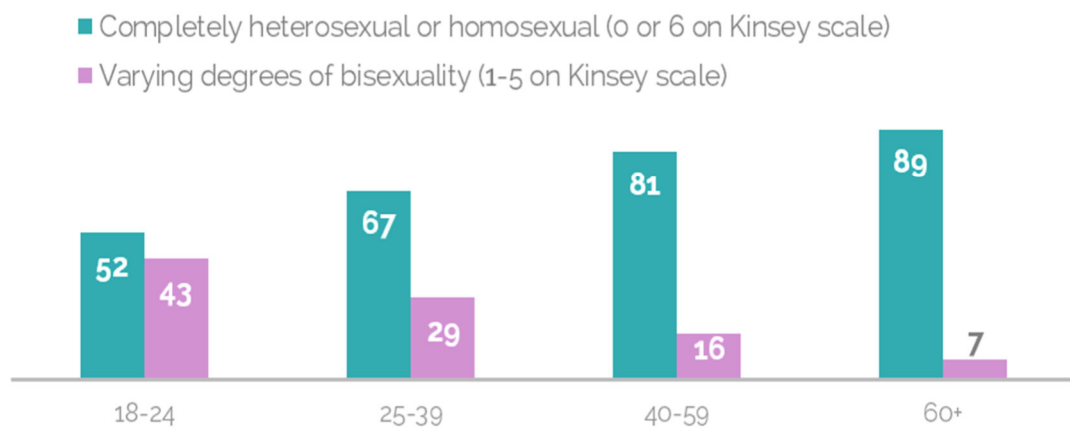
original study had a large number of methods for placing people, YouGov simply asked people to place themselves on the sexuality scale.

Taken as a whole, 72% of the British public place themselves at the completely heterosexual end of the scale, while 4% put themselves at the completely homosexual end and 19% say they are somewhere in between – classed as bisexual in varying degrees by Kinsey. Of the people that do place themselves in this 1-5 area, the majority incline away from homosexuality – 15% are closer to the heterosexual end, 2% directly in the middle and 2% are closer to the homosexual end.

With each generation, people see their sexuality as less fixed in stone. The results for 18-24 year-olds are particularly striking, as 43% place themselves in the non-binary area between 1 and 5 and 52% place themselves at one end or the other. Of these, only 46% say they are completely heterosexual and 6% as completely homosexual.

Shades of bisexuality by age

British adults were asked to place themselves on the Kinsey scale, ranging from 0 (completely heterosexual) to 6 (completely homosexual). %



YouGov | yougov.com

August 13-14, 2015

People of all generations now accept the idea that sexual orientation exists along a continuum rather than a binary choice - overall 60% of heterosexuals support this idea, and 73% of homosexuals. 28% of heterosexuals believe that 'there is no middle ground – you are either heterosexual or you are not'.

But what does it mean to be at 1 on the scale, and what is the difference being here or at 2? According to the research, progressing further away from 'completely heterosexual' (0) towards the midpoint (3, or 'completely bisexual') increases the chance that you have had a sexual experience with a member of the same sex. 23% of those at

level 1 have had a sexual encounter with a member of the same sex, while 52% of people at level 2 have had such an experience.

Clearly, these figures are not measures of active bisexuality - overall, 89% of the population describes themselves as heterosexual - but putting yourself at level 1 allows for the possibility of homosexual feelings and experiences. More than anything, it indicates an increasingly open minded approach to sexuality. In a further set of questions asking if respondents could conceivably be attracted to, have sex with or have a relationship with someone of the same sex (if the right person came along at the right time), level 1s were at least 35% more likely to say they could than level 0s.

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/08/16/half-young-not-heterosexual/>

I don't believe you can extrapolate that the figures show we are progressively becoming more homosexual, and that the morals of the young are sliding away. I think the main reason for the differences in the statistics is that older people are more reticent to discuss their orientation. My parent's generation, born shortly before the Second World War, would rarely discuss anything of a sexual nature – it would be anathema, whereas today's young people are far more willing to discuss these issues, so the figures are probably just becoming more realistic. Nevertheless, there is almost certainly some experimentation going on with the young, which settles down with age.

The key question from a Christian point of view is whether being Gay or Lesbian is a lifestyle choice, or is it intrinsic to the person, so they have no choice? The answer to that question largely determines how Christians respond to Homosexuality, and we are going to look at it in some detail again.

However, one problem is that science hasn't really come up with an incontrovertible definitive answer. By that I mean that you can't yet look in a test-tube and say this baby will be straight and this one gay, although I'm certain it will be possible in a few years. That, in itself, will present other ethical problems, such as if parents know a baby will be born gay, will they seek to terminate it? That question I first heard asked in the 1980's, but I haven't heard it discussed in recent years. What will parents with faith choose to do if they know their child will be born gay/lesbian?

If you are Gay or Lesbian, or have spent any time with anyone who is, you'll have no doubt at all that being gay is latent in an individual from the earliest years.

Science has universally accepted that homosexuality is a normal part of life, while the Church (and other religions) tears itself apart as different groups take opposing sides. Sadly, too many Christians won't properly engage with the issue, preferring their ivory towers of perceived 'certainty', thinking they are defending the faith, but little realising their foundations are built on sand. In the meantime, Science is trying to find something to show why certain people present as Gay or Lesbian and others present as straight. Over a year after I first 'finished' this essay, I came

across this article which dates back to late 2012. This iteration of the article I found on the sciencemag.org website (<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2012/12/homosexuality-may-start-womb>). It was written by Elizabeth Norton and entitled: Homosexuality May Start in the Womb, though I found other scientific journals quoting large chunks (excluding the introductory paragraph), of this verbatim:

From a strictly Darwinian viewpoint, homosexuality shouldn't still be around. It isn't the best way to pass along one's genes, and to complicate the picture further, no "gay genes" have even been identified. According to a newly released hypothesis, the explanation may not lie in DNA itself. Instead, as an embryo develops, sex-related genes are turned on and off in response to fluctuating levels of hormones in the womb, produced by both mother and child. This tug of war benefits the unborn child, keeping male or female development on a steady course even amid spikes in hormones. But if these so-called epigenetic changes persist once the child is born and has children of its own, some of those offspring may be homosexual, the study proposes.

Evolutionary geneticist William Rice of the University of California, Santa Barbara, felt there had to be a reason why homosexuality didn't just fade away down the generations. Research estimates that about 8% of the population is gay, and homosexuality is known to run in families. If one of a set of identical twins is gay, there's a 20% probability that the other will be, too.

Furthermore, Rice notes, "homosexuality isn't just a human thing." Among California gulls, which he watches from his office window, about 14% of pairs are female-female. In Australian black swans, some 6% of pairs are male-male, and 8% of male sheep are attracted exclusively to male partners.

But many genetic screens have failed to turn up genes that are responsible for sexual orientation. So to find out what makes homosexuality persist, Rice and colleagues began a comprehensive survey of the literature.

According to conventional wisdom, an embryo becomes a boy when a gene on the Y chromosome triggers the development of testes, which then begin to produce male sex hormones, including testosterone, at about the 8th week of gestation. With no Y chromosome and hence no testosterone, the embryo becomes a girl.

But testosterone doesn't explain everything, the researchers found. For one thing, female fetuses are exposed to small amounts of the hormone from their adrenal glands, the placenta, and the mother's endocrine system. At many key points of gestation, male and female fetuses are often exposed to similar amounts of testosterone. Levels of

the hormone can even be higher than normal in females and lower than normal in males without any effect on genital or brain structure.

Rice and his co-workers were more intrigued by studies showing that male and female fetuses respond differently to the hormones that surround them, even when one hormone is temporarily higher. In their study, published online today in *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, the authors propose that differences in sensitivity to sex hormones result from “epigenetic” changes. These are changes that affect not the structure of a gene but when, if, and how much of it is activated—by chemically altering a gene's promoter region or “on” switch, for example. Epigenetic changes at key points in the pathway through which testosterone exerts its effects on the fetus could blunt or enhance the hormone's activity as needed, the authors suggest.

Although epigenetic changes are usually temporary, they involve alterations in the proteins that bind together the long strands of DNA. Thus, they can sometimes be handed down to offspring. According to the hypothesis, homosexuality may be a carry-over from one's parents' own prenatal resistance to the hormones of the opposite sex. The “epi-marks” that adjusted parental genes to resist excess testosterone, for example, may alter gene activation in areas of the child's brain involved in sexual attraction and preference. “These epigenetic changes protect mom and dad during their own early development,” Rice says. The initial benefit to the parents may explain why the trait of homosexuality persists throughout evolution, he says.

“The authors have done a terrific job providing a mechanism for genetic variation, especially a variation that might not be expected to persist because it's so tightly bound to reproduction,” says evolutionary biologist Marlene Zuk of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. But she adds that to go from changes in gene expression to why someone is attracted to a person of the same sex is a question for which science may never fill in all the blanks.

An alternative site quoting this material is <http://scitechdaily.com/homosexuality-might-develop-in-the-womb-due-to-epigenetic-changes/>.

That is a stunning article because it effectively says that those who are homosexual have no choice, and the potential for their orientation didn't just come from their parents but might even have come via their grandparents. The Official details for the full study are:

Homosexuality as a Consequence of Epigenetically Canalized Sexual Development
William R. Rice, Urban Friberg and Sergey Gavrilets
The Quarterly Review of Biology - Vol. 87, No. 4 (December 2012), pp. 343-368
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
DOI: 10.1086/668167

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/668167>

During adolescence and early adulthood there can be a lot of sexual experimentation as new hormones charge around the newly adult body, and this can include same sex attraction, but normally this resolves itself. However, we are not really addressing this issue. We are interested in the lifetime orientated gay and lesbian lifestyle. Many gay and lesbian people talk about how they knew they were different from childhood, and sometimes the observation is noticed by the parents as well. Interestingly, in a tape made in the 1960s the mother of the actor Montgomery Clift says that "Monty was a homosexual early. I think he was 12 or 13." <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/oct/29/montgomery-clift-actor-untold-story-hollywood>. Given he was born in 1920, she would have been referring to the early 1930's, so the candour of that observation is quite interesting. Of the folks I have spoken to, all would say they knew well before they were 12-13yoa.

In 1948 Alfred Kinsey, who was working in this area realised that just as you can't solely have male and female, you also could not have a heterosexual male and a homosexual male. There are many stages in between, so he created a scale which became the Kinsey scale, which is still largely used, though has now sometimes been extended from 7 categories to 10. The standard 7-category scale (copied from Wikipedia) is:

Rating Description

0	Exclusively heterosexual
1	Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
2	Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
3	Equally heterosexual and homosexual
4	Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
5	Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
6	Exclusively homosexual
X	No socio-sexual contacts or reactions [Asexual]

Others like Fritz Klein (who produced his Klein Sexual Orientation Grid in 1978) built on his work and developed their own ideas, as a result.

Since his death in 1956 Kinsey's results have come under scrutiny, and his methodology rightly challenged. Many of his results were skewed, to show greater incidence of homosexuality than truly exists. Regardless of that, his work brought homosexuality into mainstream discussion and contributed to normalizing the discussion of sexuality and especially homosexuality.

If being Lesbian or Gay were purely down to individual choice, don't you think Psychiatry and Psychology would have seen through it by now? Why waste hours, days, years and decades on research, studying something, that if based simply on choice, would be fraudulent?

Even if some scientists **wanted** to get specific results, others would be kicking the door down to show how fraudulent it was. And it certainly isn't some great conspiracy against Christians.

So, with the understanding and implications of the *Homosexuality May Start in the Womb* article above, and with those questions ringing in the ears, as well as the thousands of personal stories, I must come to Scripture with a different perspective, because if the gay person has no control over their orientation (although obviously, they do have control over the **expression** of their desire, like the rest of us), we can't say they are condemned for being gay. That would make God capricious: creating people who live out their lives with no hope of being able to express and receive love in a way that pleases Him, thus resulting in a life of great unhappiness. You also can't make the argument that "the Bible is more important than science, so we hold onto the words of the Bible", regardless of what we learn from science. That is what the church did in the past when Galileo and others started saying the Earth wasn't the centre of the Universe, and, oh, by the way folks, the Earth revolves around the Sun. The church punished and persecuted these people. Then, there was a lot of shock and consternation in the church when the Americas were discovered during the Renaissance period because the Bible didn't mention it, and it was their view at the time that it should have done. How could God not have talked about a whole new continent?

We will talk about this elsewhere, but until about 1860 it was thought that sperm contained everything needed for life, and the womb was simply an incubator adding nothing to the future child. No-one knew women produced eggs. Why didn't God, or Jesus, tell us? It would have saved a lot of pain. Gay men wouldn't be despised for killing the potential for life, by spilling their seed knowing there was no chance of new life.

But we don't learn anything from history, do we?

Science is no threat to the Bible, and it may help prompt us to look at the writings slightly differently - maybe with greater integrity - it certainly doesn't devalue Scripture.

The Bible says Jonah was swallowed by a big fish, and we wonder what fish is big enough to comfortably swallow a man? Many have gone back and looked at the passage, the words used and the context, to see if there is any explanation. Does the text translated as 'big fish', have any other meanings? So far, as I understand it, we are still in the dark. But we still ask questions because a plankton-eating whale doesn't really fit.

The specific issue we want to look at here, is theoretically a bit more problematic Biblically, because there are around half a dozen Bible verses referred to as

“Clobber” passages to deal with, and we need to view them with greater depth, though with the same sensitivity. The weakness with the so-called “Clobber” passages is that there are so few of them, and that their meanings are so tenuous. Let me explain: if you do more than a cursory, superficial read of the Old Testament, you will see that God grumbles a lot about the behaviour of humanity, and in particular the Israelites. Yet, despite all the condemnation, there are only these seven passages that are regularly quoted: Genesis 1:27; Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22 (20:13); Deuteronomy 23:17-18; Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 6:9 & Timothy 1:10. In each case, there are completely rational alternative readings that do not condemn the LGBTQ+ community. Please look through all the prophets and minor prophets and read for yourself what God was complaining about. You will find it is principally idolatry, ignoring God, ignoring compassion in favour of legalism, selfishness, theft, the treatment of the poor, the weak, the alien and the powerless, adultery, false witness (lying), with a few other issues thrown in. **None** of the prophets talk about sexuality outside of the mis-behaviour of straight people. The emphasis is on behaviour. As a quick aside, when we refer to Sexual Orientation, we understand that it is made up of:

1. Identity (How I identify myself)
2. Behaviour (Who I have sex with – same-, or opposite-sex)
3. Natural Attraction (Who I am attracted to)

A huge issue to note is that the Bible only talks about same-sex BEHAVIOUR, not Attraction nor Identity, which are completely alien to any of the Biblical characters.

Just to be clear, I’m not going to differentiate much between men-on-men relationships and woman-on-woman, as from a Christian standpoint the issues are essentially the same. Terms are important, and so I will use ‘gay’ to refer to male-to-male, ‘lesbian’ to refer to female-on-female, and ‘homosexual’, if I must, to cover both. Non-affirming Christians frequently consider being gay or lesbian as chosen, changeable, and related to childhood sexual abuse or inadequate parenting – the same old tired arguments I was told when I was young, well over fifty years ago! It displays a complete inability to be willing to engage with the issue when the medical and mental health profession worldwide seem to acknowledge the issue is latent from birth and is likely to come to the fore during adolescence. Given my extensive reading – at least for a very amateur theologian – I have absolutely no problem accepting that being gay or lesbian is not a choice, but an inbuilt orientation, latent from birth.

At a simplistic level, it seems to me that Christians (and to be fair, society) have never approved of being gay or lesbian. They see it as repugnant, and a rejection of the created order. So, when translating and reading the Bible and finding some verses which are unclear, they get given a slant, based on the cultural experience and preconceptions of the translators, though probably not deliberately, which inevitably favours the rejection of being gay or lesbian. This in turn, creates a new tranche of Christians with an anti-homosexual slant. And so, the circle turns.

By way of a principle, it wouldn't seem unreasonable to assume that the translator comes across a word or phrase that has no direct meaning, even after comparing it with other places in scriptures, lexicons and literature (and other writings) of the day. In consultation with others they have a kind of mental picture of the rough concept of what they think it means, and then try and find something their readers will understand that equates with that.

Old Testament scholar John Goldingay has written a new translation of the Old Testament calling it "First Testament". In an interview he makes the point that:

Every translation is a collection of the compromises that someone is choosing to make. Translations must also change over time, as cultures change. ...

... I've mentioned that translation always involves a compromise, and this choice between emphasizing the ancient world or the contemporary world is an example of that. It isn't that one of these approaches is completely right and the other wrong; rather, it's a matter of choosing an emphasis. In fact, it is simply impossible to produce a completely faithful equivalent of one piece of writing in another language. One has to make choices, and I decided to help people hear the words as closely as possible to what they would have heard in the ancient world.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/june/first-testament-translation-john-goldingay.html>

Let me give a couple of examples of the difficulty for translators: In Matthew 18 Jesus is dealing with the issue of dealing with sin in the church. The passage says:

¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

None of you batted an eyelid at that sentence, but at the time Jesus uttered those words the concept of the word 'church' didn't really exist. People including Jesus met in synagogues, and the concept of using somewhere else to meet to worship God would have been alien. So, the question is: Who changed the word Jesus originally used and replaced it with the word 'church'? You will find the word "church" is used in every major respected English translation. So, did Matthew himself change the original word Jesus used, because he wrote his Gospel later on after the church had been formed, or did the translators change it? In either case, and it really isn't that big a deal, the text is clearer because of the change, but those who are sticklers for exact authenticity, this is a problem. Some other translations use the word 'assembly' or 'congregation', which would probably have been closer to the word Jesus used, but has less immediacy to us as readers. So, do you want authenticity or clarity? It's a difficult choice isn't it?

There is another example and I want to quote the full article, so the context is clear. It is taken from the Premier website blog written by Steve Maltz:

How easy is it to colour Holy Scripture with opinions and agendas?

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

An interesting verse, because, strictly speaking, when they were all together in one place, it wasn't Pentecost, despite what it says in the *original Greek* ... it was the Jewish festival of *Shavuot*, the 'feast of weeks'. It became Pentecost in the same way that Joseph and Mary didn't arrive at Bethlehem at *Christmas* time. Rather, it became Christmas time as a result of the events that happened then.

The word 'Pentecost' has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, it's simply derived from the Greek word for '50'. Words are interesting, aren't they? Sometimes they have very different meanings to what has been generally accepted. Also these meanings can serve to add texture to what we have read. For instance, why did the writer of Acts, use the Greek word for '50' in the above verse, rather than the word for 'weeks'? It tells us that, even by that time, the Christian message was becoming geared to the Gentile world. The English translators of the King James Version could have attempted to put this right by reverting to *Shavuot*, the original Hebrew name for the festival but they chose not to do so and, instead, used the word *Pentecost*, an approximation of the Greek equivalent of the original Hebrew word.

There is an agenda here, though most don't spot it. We see it in the decision behind the naming of a certain book of the New Testament. A clue is in the original Greek word, *Iakobos*. It is a man's name. *Jacob* is the original English translation, that we read in the Old Testament. You can see the connection between the two words. It is the same name. Yet the New Testament translation is *James*, as in 'the King James Bible'. It acts to give the reader an unconscious idea that there is separation between the *Jewish* Old Testament and the *Christian* New Testament. This idea actually comes from a second century heresy called *Marcionism*, that attempted to diminish the Jewish aspects of the Bible and it has never really gone away. Here's another example to illustrate that point. It comes from the same book:

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. (James 2:2)

All fairly innocuous until you look at the Greek word that is translated here as 'meeting'. It is *synagoga*. It changes the complexion of the whole verse, doesn't it? Correctly translated as "synagogue", it would remind us of the Jewish context of the early Church. It could, of course, be argued, that the translators simply wanted to make it

understandable to a contemporary audience. But could there be other motives? Isn't this the *Word of God* that is being manipulated here? Whose decision was it to add a spin to the original and what made them think they were following God's Will by doing so?

Words are interesting, but God's Word is precious. We need to tread carefully. <http://www.premier.org.uk/Blogs/Yeshua-Explored/It-s-all-in-the-name>

Please don't think I am undermining Scripture, I'm not – my life without the teachings of Scripture would be worthless. Scripture was written by men under the influence of the Holy Spirit and Translated by men also under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But be aware that just as Paul had to correct the early church's behaviour when the Spirit was moving them, because of their humanity, so "mistakes" can be made with the written word, as we have just illustrated above.

As already outlined, another difficulty non-affirming Christians have is that they **must** believe that being gay or lesbian **is** a choice and **is** changeable. If they accepted the condition was there from birth, their stance would have to change, because the individual would therefore be 'blameless' for their condition/orientation. In that instance, people insisting on enforced celibacy for gays and lesbians, would have to review their attitudes, which whilst not intended, are callous and heartless and if you can't anticipate it, I will explain why, shortly.

We looked at the issue of choice at the beginning, and here I want to quote the Rev Dr Kathlyn James, who as a 'straight' woman, did extensive research and combined it with her own personal experience of knowing a lesbian Christian. She talks about the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13: 24 – 30 and makes the point that even if non-affirming Christians believe those who are LGBTQ+ are weeds (though she was only applying it to gays and lesbians), we should leave it to God to pull up what are really the weeds, when the time for harvest comes. She went on to write:

*We may have different beliefs than you, but it is not your job to uproot us. To say that you love the sinner but hate the sin is not loving us. It is **not** your job to deal with what you perceive as our sin. Please, just love us for who we are, people who want to be loved, and to feel like we belong.*

Nobody in their right mind would "choose" to be gay - to be humiliated, rejected by friends and family, have their jobs in jeopardy, fear being beaten up or even murdered. No, none of us "chose" to be gay. We are who we are. We are loving people who love the Lord with all our hearts. Please don't shun us from your churches and your homes.

Please just love us and respect us, and accept us for who we are because we are God's children, and because we believe, based on Scripture, that God loves and accepts us just as He created us.

Our beliefs, in no way contradict our beloved God-inspired Scriptures. Our faith would have no meaning if we needed to twist it to suit our needs, but just as Baptists have a different view of Baptism than Salvationists, and Catholics have a different view of the Virgin Mary than Pentecostals do, so we understand Scripture in the light of the Original writings which we believe to be the ACCURATE interpretation regarding the issue of homosexuality.

<https://resources.christiangays.com/is-homosexuality-a-sin/>

The Rev Dr Kathlyn James just spoke of the pain, humiliation and rejection of being gay, but I need to add a piece by another author. Earlier I referred to Philip Yancey's 2008 book called "What's So Amazing About Grace?" Here I want to quote from p. 161 of the Zondervan, Kindle Edition where it describes Philip's long-time friendship with Pastor, Bible College tutor and Christian film consultant, Rev Dr Mel White. Philip comes across as non-affirming at the time, in the sense that he still sees homosexuality as a sin, but that he also has a gay friend who he deeply loves and supports. He writes:

We had been friends for about five years when I got a call from Mel asking if we could meet at the Marriott Hotel near O'Hare Airport. I arrived at the appointed time, then sat alone in the restaurant for an hour and a half reading the newspaper, the menu, the backs of sugar packets, and anything else I could find. No Mel. Just as I got up to leave, peeved at the inconvenience, Mel dashed in. He was apologetic, even trembling. He had gone to the wrong Marriott and then got stuck in a massive Chicago traffic jam. He had only an hour before his plane. Could I sit with him a little longer to help him calm down? "Of course."

Rattled by the morning's events, Mel seemed harried and distracted, on the verge of tears. He shut his eyes, breathed deeply a few times, and began our conversation with a sentence I will never forget. "Philip, you've probably already figured out that I'm gay."

The thought had never once crossed my mind. Mel had a loving and devoted wife and two children. He taught at Fuller Seminary, served as pastor of an Evangelical Covenant church, and made films and wrote best-selling books for Christians. Mel, gay? Is the Pope Muslim?

At that time, despite the neighborhood I lived in, I did not know one gay person. I knew nothing about the subculture. I joked about it and told stories about the Gay Pride Parade (which marched down my street) to my suburban friends, but I had no homosexual acquaintances, much less friends. The idea repulsed me.

Now I was hearing that one of my best friends had a secret side I knew nothing about. I sat back in my chair, took a few deep breaths of my own, and asked Mel to tell me his story.

*I am not breaking Mel's confidence by relating this story, because he has already gone public in his book *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*. The book mentions his friendship with me and also tells of some of the conservative Christians he previously worked with as a ghost-writer: Francis Schaeffer, Pat Robertson, Oliver North, Billy Graham, W. A. Criswell, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jerry Falwell. None of these people knew about Mel's secret life at the time he worked with them, and understandably some of them feel upset with him now.*

... I learned from Mel that homosexuality is not the casual lifestyle choice I had blithely assumed it to be. As Mel spells out in his book, he felt homosexual longings from adolescence, tried hard to repress those longings, and as an adult fervently sought a "cure." He fasted, prayed, and was anointed with oil for healing. He went through exorcism rites led by Protestants and also by Catholics. He signed up for aversion therapy, which jolted his body with electricity every time he felt stimulated by photos of men. For a time, chemical treatments left him drugged and barely coherent. Above all else, Mel wanted desperately not to be gay.

I remember a phone call that woke me up late one night. Without bothering to introduce himself, Mel said in a flat voice, "I am standing on a fifth- floor balcony overlooking the Pacific Ocean. You have ten minutes to tell me why I should not jump." This was no prank to get attention; Mel had nearly succeeded in a bloody suicide attempt not long before. I pled with him, using every personal, existential, and theological argument I could think of in my groggy state. Thankfully, Mel did not jump.

I also remember a tearful scene a few years later in which Mel brought me mementos from his gay lover. Handing me a blue wool sweater, he asked me to throw it in the fireplace. He had sinned and now repented, he said, and he was leaving that life behind him and returning to his wife and family. We rejoiced and prayed together. ...

Mel had wild swings between promiscuity and fidelity. Sometimes he would act like a hormone-flooded teenager, and sometimes like a sage. "I have learned the distinction between virtuous grief and guilty grief," he once told me. "Both are real, both are excruciating, but the latter is far worse. Virtuous grief, such as celibate people feel, knows what it lacks but does not know what it has lost. Guilty grief never stops knowing." For Mel, guilty grief meant the haunting awareness that if he chose to come out of the closet he would lose his marriage as well as his career and ministry and quite possibly his faith.

Despite these guilt feelings, Mel finally concluded that his options narrowed down to two: insanity or wholeness. Attempts to repress homosexual desires and live either in heterosexual marriage or in gay celibacy, he believed, would lead to certain insanity. (At the time he was seeing a psychiatrist five days a week, at a hundred dollars a session.) Wholeness, he decided, meant finding a gay partner and embracing his homosexual identity.

Mel's odyssey confused and disturbed me. My wife and I stayed up many long nights with Mel discussing his future. Together we went over all the relevant biblical passages and what they might mean. Mel kept asking why Christians highlighted any reference to same-sex unions while disregarding other behavior mentioned in the same passages.

At Mel's request I attended the first gay march on Washington, in 1987. I went not as a marcher, or even as a journalist, but as Mel's friend. He wanted me nearby as he sorted through some of the decisions bearing down on him.

About 300,000 gay rights marchers had gathered, and a minority clearly intended to shock the public, wearing outfits that no evening newscast could televise. The October day was chilly, and gray clouds spit raindrops on the columns parading through the capital.

As I stood on the side-lines, directly in front of the White House, I watched an angry confrontation. Mounted policemen had formed a protective circle around a small group of counterdemonstrators who, thanks to their orange posters featuring vivid illustrations of hellfire, had managed to attract most of the press photographers. Despite being outnumbered fifteen thousand to one, these Christian protesters were yelling inflammatory slogans at the gay marchers.

"Faggots go home!" their leader screamed into a microphone, and the others took up the chant: "Faggots go home, faggots go home. . . ." When that got wearisome, they switched to "Shame -on-you-for-what-you-do." Between chants the leader delivered brimstone sermonettes about God reserving the hottest fires in hell for sodomites and other perverts.

"AIDS, AIDS, it's comin' your way" was the last taunt in the protesters' repertoire, and the one shouted with the most ardor. We had just seen a sad procession of several hundred persons with AIDS: many in wheelchairs, with the gaunt bodies of concentration camp survivors. Listening to the chant, I could not fathom how anyone could wish that fate on another human being.

For their part, the gay marchers had a mixed response to the Christians. Rowdy ones blew kisses or retorted, "Bigots! Bigots! Shame

on you!" One group of lesbians got a few laughs from the press by yelling in unison to the protesters, "We want your wives!"

Among the marchers were at least three thousand who identified themselves with various religious groups: the Catholic "Dignity" movement, the Episcopalian group "Integrity," and even a sprinkling of Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists. More than a thousand marched under the banner of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a denomination that professes a mostly evangelical theology except for its stance on homosexuality. This last group had a poignant reply to the beleaguered Christian protesters: they drew even, turned to face them, and sang, "Jesus loves us, this we know, for the Bible tells us so."

The abrupt ironies in that scene of confrontation struck me. On the one side were Christians defending pure doctrine (not even the National Council of Churches has accepted the MCC denomination for membership). On the other side were "sinners," many of whom openly admit to homosexual practice. Yet the more orthodox group spewed out hate and the other group sang of Jesus' love.

This is a very helpful article because it is written by a non-affirming Christian, talking about the experience of a passionate and highly educated Christian. I want to draw attention to the lengths Rev Dr Mel White went to, to try to become 'straight'. Despite his passion and desire to change, every method failed, and clearly this reinforces the idea that what we are discussing is not a choice, but a hard-wired orientation. He simply had no choice about his orientation.

There are many parallels between Rev Dr Mel White's story and that of the singer, theologian and worship leader Vicky Beeching. I quoted her earlier and will do so in more detail later, but in her book, 'Undivided', she talks about the strain of trying to live as if she were straight. The strain of trying to live within a heterosexual environment whilst denying her orientation, nearly killed her, and has resulted in long-term health problems. Please buy her book and read her, at times, heart-breaking story – there's *your* mascara warning!

These kinds of stories are common in Christian circles. I know of someone else who travelled to a distant country to get away from family and social pressures and to seek healing and advice from an internationally renowned church, and other agencies. This person described to me how they had felt different from around 10 years old. They went on to describe the increasing tension over the following 15 years, till they eventually left home in their mid-twenties to travel to this distant country. Like the Rev Dr Mel White, the healing never materialised, despite the desperation in which it was sought, the only advice really being given was, to remain celibate.

Clearly there are a lot of other things we could comment on with Mel's story, but regardless of whether their theology was right or wrong, the Christian protesters hatred of gays is unacceptable, and they will have to account to God for their

attitude. This is not what Jesus would do. Sadly, this attitude is all too prevalent in the UK, from what I have observed, both personally and in written form. On the Premier Christian Radio website, which is far more widely ranging than purely radio, there are frequently comments from many trolls particularly over issues relating to the gay community. One such exchange saw this posting following an article about hatred, which was written in the aftermath of the mass killing of gays and lesbians at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando on the 14th September, 2016, and I won't reveal the name of the author. I simply present it as written at the time. No punctuation has been changed:

The bible has no person classed as 'gay' or as you would have us believe pre determined to engage in wicked sexual perversions with people of the same sex it describes them as perverted Sodomites and evil sinners .the bible describes this as evil not love .you claim the rulings of the bible are hateful ..because you have a wicked reprobate mind ...and are controlled by Satan ...a killer and a murderer from the start ...we see this in the continued spread of hiv/aids where 1% of the population account for over 50% of all infections as they prefer to fulfil their wicked desires and sodomise each others Colons even at the risk of death .more Sodomites have killed each other through this method than any Islamic terrorist ever has .
yes we see what 'love' this culture of selfishness and death is founded upon
love of self and love of pleasure over all things while hating God and his word and still you rebel REPENT..! or perish ...the choice is... as always.. at least for now entirely yours...
<https://www.premier.org.uk/Blogs/Commentary-with-E.-David-Cook/Orlando-Killing-Love-is-Better-Than-Hate>

[Currently it looks like the Disqus comments have been removed from the article – thankfully.]

Most of the comments are just bickering by ignorant folk, which is not edifying, but sadly there are some like the above, that are full of hate stemming from ignorance. The type of rhetoric we just read is all too common, but let's get back to Philip Yancey. Later in the same chapter of that book Philip describes the vitriolic correspondence sent to his friend Mel:

My friendship with Mel has taught me much about grace. On the surface the word may seem a shorthand expression for the fuzzy tolerance of liberalism: can't we all just get along? Grace is different, though. Traced back to its theological roots, it includes an element of self-sacrifice, a cost.
I have seen Mel demonstrate a graceful spirit time and again to Christians who revile him. Once I asked to see a batch of the hate-mail he gets from Christians, and I could barely make it through the letters. The pages were septic with hatred. In the name of God, writers rained

down curses and profanity and threats. I kept wanting to protest, "Wait, Mel is my friend. You don't know him." To the letter writers, though, Mel was a label — pervert! — not a person. Knowing Mel, I understand better the dangers Jesus discussed so incisively in the Sermon on the Mount: how quickly we accuse others of murder and neglect our own anger, or of adultery and neglect our own lust. Grace dies when it becomes us versus them.

*I have also read some of the letters Mel received in response to his book *Stranger at the Gate*. Most came from gay people and simply told a story. Like Mel, many of the letter writers had attempted suicide. Like Mel, many had experienced nothing but rejection from the church. Eighty thousand books sold, forty-one thousand reader responses— could that ratio say something about the hunger for grace in the homosexual community?*

It is so sad how people who profess to know the Saviour of the world, and have a relationship with Him, claiming to love others with that self-giving love born of the Holy Spirit, can behave like this. I am horrified, angered and deeply saddened. I should be shocked, but sadly, I'm not that shocked. However, you will argue that regardless of how badly people behave, if the lifestyle is wrong in the eyes of God, the bad behaviour of others doesn't give a sentimental 'free pass' to carry on doing the things that are 'so wrong'. I will argue later that I no longer believe Scripture **does** condemn the 'gay'.

By way of explanation, Phillip Yancey referred to the aversion therapy that Mel underwent. You can find out a lot more about what is involved in Aversion Therapy for gay people, by using the search engine of your choice and spending an hour looking through all the various web pages. Don't take my word for it, look for yourself. However, the BBC has a very helpful article on the subject here: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3258041.stm>. Yes, it was written in 2003, but the point it makes is that even in those days it was recognised that it did not work, so it is of no surprise that ultimately, ex-gay groups like Exodus International, who we will talk about later, closed their doors.

At the same time do not ignore the fact that the treatments given to patients, were utterly vile, and would not be permitted against a prisoner of war. From a Christian standpoint, they would be utterly repugnant to God, and cannot be countenanced by any Christian. The ends do not justify the means.

Let me tell you another story, quoted by Matthew Vines in his book "God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships". Here he is telling the story of the tensions of being gay in a Christian family:

"Let me share the story of Rob and Linda Robertson, a Christian couple from Seattle I've come to know. Their story is heart wrenching, but their actions and attitudes as parents demonstrated deep, unconditional love. When he was twelve, their son Ryan told them he was attracted to boys, not girls. They let Ryan know that they deeply loved him. "We will

always love you. And this is hard. Really hard. But we know what God says about this, so you are going to have to make some really difficult choices.... You are going to have to choose to follow Jesus, no matter what. And since you know what the Bible says, and since you want to follow God, embracing your sexuality is not an option.” For the next six years, Linda and Rob repeated that message. They also went out of their way to try to help their son. They gave him books about overcoming sexual temptation, encouraged him to build deep friendships with straight guys, and helped him find spiritual nourishment and support at the church youth group. Ryan, for his part, worked every day to overcome his desires, wanting desperately to please God and his parents. But as years passed and nothing changed, Ryan began to feel overwhelmed by anguish and hopelessness. So around age eighteen, feeling depressed, suicidal, and rejected by God, he turned to drugs in a desperate search for any kind of relief. He told his parents, “Mom, I want you and Dad to know that I have been researching hallucinogens, and I am going to try using them to see if I can find some peace.” He left home, and for the next year and a half, his family didn’t know where he was. By the time he contacted them, their earlier fear about his sexual orientation had been replaced with the desire simply to see him again and let him know he was loved — “No buts. No conditions. Just because he breathes.” Fortunately, Ryan did come back, and over the next ten months, they were able to repair much that had been damaged in their relationship. But after ten months in recovery, Ryan relapsed— and overdosed— while spending an evening with old friends. He spent the next seventeen days in intensive care, and died on July 16, 2009, at age twenty. Rob and Linda’s world was shattered. As Linda wrote, “We had unintentionally taught Ryan to hate his sexuality. And since sexuality cannot be separated from the self, we had taught Ryan to hate himself.... What we had wished for, prayed for, hoped for — that we would not have a gay son — came true. But not at all in the way we had envisioned.” Rob and Linda loved their son dearly, and they worked hard to show that to him. But even when they expressed their beliefs as compassionately as they did, their non-affirming understanding of homosexuality ultimately led Ryan to a place of despair and tragic self-harm. [Kindle Page 157]”

This would be a good time to insist you view a video by Matthew Vines on YouTube filmed in 2012, when he was a 21yr old theological student. It is a well-constructed video devoid of a lot of the heat and anger one normally expects when this issue comes to the fore, but instead is well reasoned, articulate, sensitive and at times emotional, but not emotive. Matthew comes from a non-affirming background and despite having been hurt by attitudes he has faced, has not chosen to adopt a reactionary stance, but is very conciliatory, asking us to

understand him. I highly commend this video. So even if you come to the issue with fixed views, please watch this as it provides a wonderful background. It is on YouTube, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>. If at some point in the future it gets moved, do an internet search for: *"The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality"* Matthew Vines. It's a little over an hour long, but it is an hour well spent. I wish I had seen this video when I was much younger. I could have saved someone from the pain of lost hope, and possibly from feeling of a kind of rejection – at least from me.

I think that one of the problems I have with the non-affirming church stand against being gay or lesbian is that when you take the whole tenor of scripture (from Genesis to Revelation) and try and apply the principles, it is difficult to see quite why God would be so dead against gays and lesbians. I think the question we are trying to address is: Exactly what is the sin? At what exact point in the relationship does the "sin" occur? Does it occur with that first furtive glance, or when you engage in interested conversation, or when you touch for the first time, or with intimacy – whatever the form? When – at what point do you tick the box and say sin has occurred? **Why** is being gay so very bad? For example, all of us sin on a regular basis, so even if some aspect of the behaviour of a gay or lesbian were a sin, we are no different – literally no different, at all. If we say they can't enter heaven, then we can't either, unless something else is at play, and I have never heard a non-affirming person of faith explain rationally why the 'sin' of being gay or lesbian is so dreadful and worse than any other sin. All anyone says, is that the homosexual doesn't even try not to sin, since they continue to live a homosexual lifestyle whether in a relationship or not, whereas although the rest of us sin, we try to change, even if we fail. That is so shallow it doesn't deserve a riposte; especially given the stories we have just been reading. The other popular argument is simply that "the Bible says so," but never explain **why** the Bible should be so against it, and exactly what it is that God objects to. Along with the Psalmist I echo Psalm 119: 34: *"Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart"*.

These seem to be the main issues quoted – they are subjective not authoritative:

- being gay or lesbian is wrong because there is no chance of procreation ("fill the earth and subdue it"). Nowadays, with condoms and pills, that too would be a problem for the heterosexual.
- if two men have anal sex one plays the dominant and the other the submissive, which goes against God's will for man – but that is a somewhat patriarchal argument, but how does this apply for lesbians. That argument about one playing the dominant and the other the submissive, gets turned on its head from time to time in many straight relationships, because partners change from dominant to submissive, and back to dominant, during a single session of lovemaking. Our notion of dominant and submissive is utterly irrelevant in today's culture.

- God made man and woman to 'fit' together naturally and this isn't true of the Gay and Lesbian. But we have already dealt with that in our discussion of the fallout from the Fall.
- Oral sex – common-place in all types of relationships.
- Anal sex is wrong, and unnatural. This comes from the rather naïve and quaintly innocent view that only gay men have anal sex, and straight people don't. Very close to the beginning of the essay I quoted from the US study, **National Health Statistics Reports, Number 36 - March 3, 2011**, where they reported it appears that anal sex occurs more frequently within relationships of straight couples than one would expect, and the figures are significant and rising. That is quite a surprise, and kicks the legs away from many prejudices, we as Christians hold. You can't be against gay people for having anal sex, while straight couples also practice it. You can view the details on the following pages, and if they have been taken down do your own internet search for "anal sex statistics":
 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4949144/>
 - <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/37-sex-stats-you-need-to-know-115238390263.html>
 - https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/key_statistics/s.htm#analsex
 - <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/news/a36431/everyone-having-anal-without-me/> (This is somewhat lighter in style, and readers of a nervous, sensitive disposition might like to skip this one. Don't say I didn't warn you!)

If you are using one of those lines, where is the Scriptural foundation and endorsement of using the argument only towards a small group of people, and not everyone?

I'm not saying anal sex is common-place, but it is practiced by a significant minority of not just gay, but straight people. Although its prevalence has been rising in the last few decades, it has always been there, but not talked about. From the above links, the Cosmopolitan article, with its warnings of pain, and possible health issues, helps us understand why even the gay community may not be practicing it as much as we naïvely assumed. So, we have a problem, don't we? If anal sex is the big thing that is wrong, why isn't the Bible clear – it isn't known to be shy with its language? That way a straight, married, Christian couple would be warned not to do it. In truth, most people take the line that what a married couple chooses to do in the confines of their bedroom, is their own concern and is the business of no-one else.

Furthermore, if anal sex is wrong, we need to know why. Is it a health/hygiene problem – in which case, with modern cleansing being far superior to the Bronze age nomads, this really isn't an issue. Or is it a holiness issue? If so, there is nothing in the Bible to explain that. So, what we have done is demonstrate that all the arguments against the gay community have absolutely no foundations, because every one of them is found in the straight community, yet without comment.

Let's play a logic game: if a gay couple never have anal sex (one of the above articles imply that this is true for close to 14% of gay men) although they don't abstain from other forms of intimacy, but a straight Christian couple do enjoy anal sex from time to time, is anyone in trouble in God's eyes? What is the basis of your decision – whichever side of the argument you take?

If God is against a group of people on the grounds of an accident of birth, something they have no control over, then I would argue, that seems to fly in the face of the teachings of Scripture, and God's nature. You might as well make a case for God condemning all those who are less than perfect because of any other genetic frailty. We could start with all people under a specific height (Dwarfism is suffered by .000025% of the population); or, all very tall people; those with ginger hair; those who wear glasses or contact lenses (because their vision is less than perfect), folks on the autism spectrum of disorders; stutterers; those with sickle-cell anaemia or carriers; left handed people; or ... How silly do you want this to get?

My call is that we look at Jesus, who embraced/embraces all the disadvantaged of society, and these days I have not a shred of doubt, that would include the gay community and AIDS victims. When we saw Princess Diana shake the hands of AIDS victims, we also saw the person of Jesus embrace them. I don't know whether Diana had a faith, but in that moment, she reflected Him, and we saw Him through her.

As this is the only time I mention AIDS I need to do a brief detour and will be back on subject in a moment. Understand that AIDS is not the gay disease many have claimed, because straight people have also been caught right up in it, but it **has** disproportionately affected the gay community. But we do need to dispel some myths: it wasn't a disease created in the 1980's, but sixty years earlier, nearly 100 years ago, in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). [See <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20151119-we-know-the-city-where-hiv-first-infected-a-human?ocid=fbert> and <http://futurism.com/hiv-scientists-uncovered-the-birthplace-of-the-disease-that-refuses-to-die/>] One other point I need to draw attention to: AIDS is not God's judgement on the Gay community. As I said, AIDS developed about one hundred years ago. When AIDS exploded in the 80's it also affected haemophiliacs, drug addicts and Haitians. If it really was God's judgement, there should have been no other groups affected – no collateral damage. Why Haitians specifically? Haitians were so poor they were selling their own blood plasma but there was little or no sterilisation between patients when their red blood cells, minus the plasma, were reinjected.

If God is going to truly judge, His Judgement **must** be personal and specific, not generalised, particularly if we call Him Just and Merciful. Otherwise it is like the Americans killing a terrorist leader using a drone strike – and with it the 100 other people at the wedding he was attending. When we appear before God at the end of history, do you want a personal judgement/assessment based on your relationship with Jesus, or just a generalised one where you are lumped in with a whole group of people?

If AIDS was God's judgement on gay people, why not lesbians, and why haemophiliacs – why are they acceptable collateral damage? Do you see how stupid this thinking really is? If a terrapin gets into a large pond and starts eating all the creatures already living in the pond, the appropriate action is to catch it and deal with it, not poison the pond so that everything dies including the terrapin.

Just now we were talking about how Jesus embraced the disadvantaged, and in that context, it should be noted he never spoke out against gays, but was very outspoken when talking to and about the religious establishment with their love of the written code and their failure to engage their hearts into the situations they found themselves – does that sound familiar?

I find it significant that Jesus utters not a word against sexual orientation and identity, and Paul's teaching is dependent on how you interpret certain specific words, when he could easily have used other words that were around at the time, with clearer meanings.

This should be seen in the light of John 5: 22-23:

²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

So, if God "has entrusted all judgment to the Son" and yet Jesus doesn't condemn, what should we make of that? Why are we as Christians so eager to condemn when Jesus didn't? The homosexual community has been with us in one form or another since the beginning of history.

The church's attitude towards the gay community and Gay-Christians has been a 'problem' for us for a long time. Most Christians tend to take an anti-gay stance, because we believe our attitudes defend and honour God. Others take a permissive stance on almost everything. I now fully embrace and affirm the Christian LGBTQ+ community, as my brothers and sisters in Jesus, but I like this extract from an article written by Peyton Jones, someone who, I believe, regards being gay or lesbian as a sin, although comes across in the main article as being very accepting. Here is an extract:

"In Jesus' day the Pharisees were committed to upholding the law with heartless precision, while the Sadducees were dedicated to throwing out anything that was difficult to believe. Religious conservatives and liberals. Jesus neatly avoided both camps.

Today theological liberals have adopted a "theology of convenience" in their dedication to reaching LGBTs, but dodge the difficult responsibility of faithfully representing a God who is as pure and holy as he is loving. Conservatives make their protective last stand on the high hill of morality, but dodge the difficult responsibility of actually loving their neighbours.

Both sides push people further away—though in opposite directions—from the God of the Bible. One side erects an idol of purely tolerant

love, while the other preaches a righteous but wrathful deity that no one really could love. Both versions of God are easy to ignore.

Jesus glided deftly between these extremes. He threw no barriers in people's way, nor did he compromise God's holiness. There is tension here. It's not easy to understand, to preach, or to live. It probably takes a divine being to get that exactly right."

The full article starts here: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/fall/gospel-in-lgbt-world.html> (unfortunately it's now behind a free login, but it's worth the extra effort), and I have quoted the link at the end of the document, as a must-read.

I come back to those questions again: exactly what are we calling a sin? Is it the attraction to, or love of, someone of the same gender? Is it the act of intimacy? Is it the commitment to the well-being of someone of the same gender? David had a deep love of Jonathan and cared for every need of Mephibosheth (for the sake and memory of Jonathan), and God commends and praises him.

As we have already pointed out, there is nothing in the act of intimacy between gay people that isn't practiced by straight people. So, it's difficult to make a case for exactly what it is that is sinful. If you could make a case, that somehow the act of intimacy might be perceived as being sinful; a homosexual, not currently in a relationship, is not sinning, even though there is every likelihood of sinning (by engaging in a relationship) sometime in the future. But that's exactly like me really – God has forgiven me, I am not sinning this instant, but there is a good chance I will sin again soon and will need to seek God's forgiveness! Having said that, using Jesus' view of how sin operates; that person, might be dreaming of intimacy with a partner, so perhaps **that** could be construed as sin. If that person is just longing for someone with whom they can share love – to both give and receive love, **that** can only be a sin if simply having the homosexual orientation itself is a sin. If it isn't, there isn't a problem.

Look, it obviously isn't a sin, and although other elements of my thinking will be expanded throughout this essay, one key reason seems to be that LGBTQ+ folk are only responding according to their nature, and physically **cannot** love someone of the opposite sex. We are all responding to God's call to be the best human we can, so it is with the LGBTQ+ community. Shouting at a lesbian that she must love a man, won't help in the slightest, and just illustrates the ignorance and stupidity of the abuser. Let me also quote a parable of Jesus about the penitent Tax Collector, from Luke 18:

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³ *“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*

¹⁴ *“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

In this story, we have a tax-collector, acknowledging his sin before God, recognising how wretched he was, but goes home justified before God. Jesus doesn't tell us the man would do anything to stop being a tax-collector in the future. We can't read more into the passage than we are told, so we can't say that he did what Zacchaeus did, besides we are all different and act in different ways, facing different pressures of life. The significant thing is that we are not told that anything changes, even though he goes home forgiven.

David, in his Psalms says:

¹ *Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;*

² *Lord, hear my voice.*

*Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.*

³ ***If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?***

⁴ ***But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.***

As I read the Bible, LGBTQ+ people are forgiven in the same way as the rest of us are, so that they “can, with reverence, serve [God].” Many serve God with integrity, passion, and reverence, and yet are disgracefully abused, hurt and insulted by the church.

Just to be clear, yes, I'm angry with the church, but not the whole church. Some of the church welcomes and affirms the outcasts, and may God bless them. However, currently, I feel the issue within Christian circles has far too much heat and not enough light and integrity.

I have heard folks use an argument along the lines that: given that God made us, we should be happy with the body we have been given, and act in accordance with the role God has given us. (To a degree we have already looked at some elements of this thinking, in the example of Thalidomide and other conditions.) The theology sounds good, but it depends on how you view God's day-to-day involvement with humanity. However, this is an easy point to make if you are gender typical.

Looking around, I can't accept that God is actively creating every person as they are formed. He CAN do so, but I don't for a minute think he does, and instead, I believe he permits and allows differences in our genetic code and environment to affect us. Nevertheless, even with our abilities and disabilities, our perfections, and imperfections, we all reflect the image of our Creator.

Let's take a step back. Look at dogs and their almost infinite variations of character, temperament, physique and health. Dog breeders will seek to breed-in

certain attributes they think people will want, even if it harms the breed, or create new lines, strengthen a pedigree, and breed out weaknesses; and the same goes for farmers with their cattle and sheep. This is true for gardeners, growers and horticulturalists as they seek to create the perfect orchid and others seek to create the longest flowering and most pest resistant flowers that must travel from field to customer still looking their best for the longest time. Apart from these mankind-managed mutations, genetic mutations happen quite naturally. Genes create all sorts of changes, in a myriad of areas. It is wrong and irresponsible to say that gender and the mind, and the wiring between the two would be excluded from the effects of the Fall. As an aside, some close friends of mine used to have a Chihuahua which they found had mixed physical genders (Intersex) when taking it to have it neutered. These things aren't common but do regularly happen now and then.

Returning to the issue of whether God actively and individually creates every person as they are formed, I have real problems. If he actively gave me chronic asthma and eczema as a child, and actively created children born with severely deformed and missing limbs during the Thalidomide crisis of the sixties, or creating others who know nothing but pain as they tread the narrow path between life and death before ultimately succumbing, and all sorts of other problems, I would see God as spiteful and capricious, and I don't believe him to be so. Does God really sit there and say: "I think we'll give this next baby 'spina bifida', and then we'll make a few healthy babies, then we'll make another baby blind, but they'll be able to give her surgery to correct it. Shortly we'll make someone without limbs - but I'll love them just as much as the others. Oh, and let's make the next one grow up to be gay - I'll love him, but I'll consign him to the fires of Hell." I apologise those examples border on the grossly offensive, but I'm making a point, and that's definitely not the God I know, or recognise.

Having said that, I'm going to make life a little difficult for myself by quoting a passage from Exodus. It comes in Chapter 4 and verse 11, which says: *The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"* Whilst that seems to cut the legs from under me, I think the writer is actually making a completely different point about the Sovereignty and Omnipotence of God, something the Israelite/Jewish readers would pick up on before they even begin to think about the literal claims that we as Western Christians would see first. In this regard, we always need to read the Old Testament in the light of the New, and especially in the light of the teachings of Jesus. But we also need to try and view it as the original Jewish hearers/readers would have done.

"Most importantly, Christians should always start their reflections about God with their minds fixed upon the person of Jesus Christ, for he is the decisive revelation of God to us (e.g. John 1:14, 18; 14:7-10). Throughout his ministry Jesus came against all infirmities and diseases as things that God does not will. Never once did he ascribe these things to his Father's will".

For a fuller explanation of Exodus 4:11 see <http://reknew.org/2008/01/exodus-411/> from where that previous sentence came.

Being gay or lesbian generates a whole lot of different responses and other folk have said: "Love the sinner but hate the sin". It's a horrible expression that sounds superficially Godly, but usually it's a situation where folks think they are verbalising their 'love', but they are blind to the fact that their actions and attitudes say the exact opposite. It is variously credited to Augustine and Ghandi²⁰ but doesn't appear in the Bible. It is offensively elitist in that we label someone as a sinner whilst also saying how much better we are, compared to "them".

To illustrate that, in a piece about LGBTQ+ Christians in Glasgow, Laura Howell, an attender of MCC in Glasgow, was quoted by the Herald newspaper saying:

"There's that term that's bandied around: love the sinner, hate the sin, which can actually make you feel really bad about yourself, it can make you feel somehow you're not good enough, that you're not going to be accepted.

"But I think the core message of Christianity is about loving one another and I think I don't believe that there would be a god that would be so cruel as to create people who are gay or bisexual or trans but not love us all."

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15428243.The_LGBT_church_restoring_faith_to_the_community/#gallery1

So, if you ever use that expression, please stop. It isn't helpful and doesn't honour God. In God's name why do Christians make LGBTQ+ Christians, and wannabe Christians, hate themselves? Don't you recognise the damage it does? You ask, "How do we do that? We only show them love". No, you don't – you come across as considering yourself as superior. You do it every time you accuse them of sinning. Most Gay people do not want to be different; they simply have no choice. They know they sin (just like the rest of us) but then you tell them they are guilty of a different one - the worst possible sin; one they can do nothing about. No wonder they learn to hate themselves. Christians will have to answer to the God of Love, who will ask why they have so badly tarnished His Character, by teaching people to loathe themselves. And then you wonder why mental health in the Community is an issue?

At the outset, we need to recognise that same-sex attraction, in one form or another has been around since the dawn of history, and certainly since the beginning of recorded history. *"In his Symposium, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato described (through the character of the profane comedian Aristophanes) three sexual orientations, and provided explanations for their existence using an invented creation myth. Aristophanes' fable is only one of many perspectives on*

²⁰ "Hate the sin and not the sinner is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world". From his autobiography, The Story of My Experiments With the Truth

love in the Symposium, and should not be considered identical with Plato's own ideas." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terminology_of_homosexuality. There is little point in my always copying and pasting large chunks of information from other sites. You might as well go direct to the source. It is worth reading the Wiki pages at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality>. It is also worth remembering that homosexual behaviour is demonstrated in animals, birds, insects, reptiles and fish as we said at the beginning – it is common throughout creation: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_animals_displaying_homosexual_behavior. We can't therefore argue that this is purely a human issue, although many ignorant Christians still do, sadly. Although those are Wikipedia citations, there are references to many, many other sources within each article. So, fact-check it.

You might ask whether homosexuality would have occurred if the Fall hadn't happened. That's like asking whether we would have had different coloured eyes, hair, or skin. We can't possibly know, so it's a waste of time, and like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin! We are where we are. However, let's stick with the idea that it's part of the impact of the Fall. It's only a big deal because we choose to make it a big deal as part of our worldview. If Scripture is not against it as I'll be arguing, we should simply view it with the same importance as many other identity traits, some will be negative and some positive (for a list of 638 primary personality traits, see <http://ideonomy.mit.edu/essays/traits.html>). I wonder how many secondary personality traits... Do your own search!

Looking at the effects of the Fall, clearly God's plan had to **change**. It's a bit like dropping a tin of paint. The paint has spilled and splashed everywhere. The only way to stick to the original plan is to turn back time far enough that all the paint is back in the tin, and make sure the tin is placed somewhere safe, so it isn't dropped. Alternatively, start Creation all over again, because at this stage, theoretically only two people are involved, although there were a lot of heavenly bodies!

However, although you have changed time and stopped the tin dropping, you probably can't prevent that from happening sometime in the future – well, you could, but only by creating a machine programmed to perform a function in a precise and exact manner time and time again, without failing. In our case, God chooses to accept what has happened, leave the paint where it is, and move forward and try and find another way to create what He considers as a beautiful creation, with all its variation and potential. We have spent a long time talking about the effect of the Fall on sexuality, so I'll not go over what I've already written, other than to reiterate that it is to be expected that the Fall would affect every area of life and that must include sexuality. How can it not?

However, I do need to explore the area a bit more. Do not misunderstand me – I am NOT implying or saying, that being gay or lesbian and transgender are deformities or illnesses, but they are traits like being left-handed, or shy/super confident – simply part of what it means to be human. Remember I said earlier that the Fall "included: health, death, relationships, but also IQ's and abilities - to think, plan, reason, create, remember and communicate". Just as you and I have

different abilities and IQ's (which we don't regard as handicaps, unless they are at one extreme or the other), so sexualities may have changed from what we perceive as God's original intention, if you hold to a traditional view. For myself I now find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to argue from that position. Lesbians and gays are not 'broken' straight people, they are created in God's image (the **Imago Dei**, theologically speaking), just as we all are. You cannot argue that they are not made in the image of God – if you do, you run into huge theological problems. Indeed, in many ways lesbians and gays are better equipped than the rest of us – they tend to be far more creatively/artistically/musically gifted, and their numbers in the entertainment industry seem to be disproportionate to their percentage in society. Gays are also not bound by the weight of societal expectations of how a male should behave, they are released from those pressures that many of us experience at times, so in many ways they are special.

We don't seek healing for different levels of intelligence; we just accept them and work with what we've got. Every cell, cluster of cells, chemical and organ, can be formed incorrectly in the womb. Just as in the womb, they can change or go wrong during life following injury, or when normal human chemicals pass through late or early, or if the wrong chemicals interact with a cell. Cells may divide at the right rate, too slowly, or too quickly. Much of what the body does, we cannot control, but must learn to live with what we get. Clearly the Fall has had a huge impact on our lives.

I was asked a good but loaded question and had to mull it over and consider how I would view it. I was asked whether I would agree that if Homosexuality did not exist prior to the Fall, and only came about after it, that would imply it came about either as a result of disorder, or as a result of sin. It was explained that, "To me 'disorder' is a broader category [than disease] which encompasses things considered diseases but are not limited to those things. Disorders are those things that exist as a result of something not functioning the way God originally intended. For example, death, natural disasters, predators among the animal world, etc. These conditions are not diseases, but exist only because of the Fall of Man."

The question is only significant if you take a literalist view of Creation. I can't, because the two stories of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2 have the inconsistent differences I mentioned in an earlier chapter. (Genesis 1 saying man was created on the 6th day, and Genesis 2 saying man was created before the vegetation had sprung up. However, taking a literalist position for the moment, when Adam and Eve were Created it would be unlikely either of them were white-skinned or blue-eyed, or alternatively (from a perfection point of view) had significantly different intellectual abilities. Had they been created with largely different intelligence levels, they would have been less than perfect, both literally, and when considering the Laws of Moses. We'll look at the Laws of Moses a little later, but I'll allow myself to get side-tracked for a moment just to explore that phrase. There would be a hint of uncleanness about that type of unequal relationship. To give a taster, I buy a brand-new shirt and put it on. It's perfect. I pour myself a glass of red wine which is also perfect. However, that same wine, when spilt on that brand-new shirt

makes the shirt dirty and the wine undrinkable. Both are perfect in their own way, but when it is in the wrong place, one makes the other dirty even if both are materially unchanged, or 'clean'! I quote a variation of this example in Chapter 9 dealing with Old Testament passages, when I specifically look at Leviticus.

So, if there were significant differences, 'perfection' as the early Jews understood it, would not be possible. Even today, when we are used to living with the effects of the Fall, we rarely by choice, tend to develop strong relationships with those of significantly differing intellectual abilities to our own (whether greater or lesser). We select people like us.

Returning to our subject, if we assume that Adam and Eve truly existed as historic figures, they had to be the most perfect beings God created, and He saw that they were good! Probably perfect in every possible way with no idiosyncrasies; with perfectly matching (not identical, but complementary) characters, co-ordination, understanding – and anything else you can think of!

Their DNA would have been identical (Eve being created from Adam's rib), so how do we explain the diversity of DNA in humans today. Theoretically, if Adam and Eve had the same DNA, so would their children. So how did the DNA diversity occur? And by the way, we don't see that diversity as a problem, in fact we regard it as advantageous in producing healthy offspring.

Part of my struggle when considering the perfection of Eden described in Genesis, is that everything was portrayed as idyllic in the garden. However, we know that the Earth has always been undergoing change, and cataclysms have occurred since the formation of the Earth. So, when did Eden occur in the scheme of things? Let's dig a bit: When it was first created, Earth was a molten globe, which then cooled. Asteroids pummelled the Earth, landmasses have moved as the tectonic plates shift, and in their separation, movement and crashing together earthquakes occur, which themselves generate tsunamis. Volcanos have always occurred although they occur less frequently now than they would have done 50k years ago, let alone millions of years ago. Even in the days of the dinosaurs, conditions were unpleasant to our modern perspective.

A research team from the University of Southampton and its international partners, write in a paper with the catchy title: *Extreme ecosystem instability suppressed tropical dinosaur dominance for 30 million years*, (published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences) suggest that an unstable climate – which scientists link with elevated levels of CO₂ – caused dinosaurs to avoid the tropics for 30 million years. The instability characterised by the scientists as involving "wet seasons in some years and extreme droughts in others," which was "punctuated by raging wildfires every few dozen years that reached temperatures of up to 600° Celsius."

Maybe when the Bible is alluding to perfection and order, it is using what I suspect was the thinking at the time: that things occurring as they were designed to work, the natural and entirely predictable, were perfect. We regard natural disasters and catastrophes as such because of their impact on humankind, because of the loss of

life, so at the beginning of humanity, by definition, there were few people around, so the impact on them was significantly less, and life would probably have seemed idyllic. (The impact could have also been significantly greater if the event occurred close to where people were living!) So that's another reason I have dropped my 'literalist' badge in a large pond marked "No fishing"!

Anyway, I'm here to deal with a different issue so let's get back to the question I was asked. The question is really looking at the homosexual and saying, either you have a disorder/disease from which you need to be healed, or that you have sinned and need to repent. Both are wrong, in my understanding of God's grace, and in the general tenor of Scripture, especially if you understand that gays and lesbians were born with their designated sexuality latent within them – and, if that *is* the case, how can they be held responsible? Did I do anything to be born straight? Was there a day I decided I would be straight? Of course not! The same is utterly true of my LGBTQ+ friends. We will come back to the healing issue again, near the end of the essay. Hence, I believe there needs to be a third option, which I believe is more plausible. As we have said, at the Fall (however that really happened), our bodies were genetically affected by all the conditions we have already outlined, some of which we regard as needing drug or surgical treatment and others where we don't regard it as an issue at all: skin colour; hair being straight or curly; eye colour; intelligence level; nose size and shape, blood types. You'll think of others! By the way there are 8 blood types, so which type did God give Adam and Eve, and what came after "sin entered the world", or are all part of God's perfection, so how does that work? (I hope you recognise mischief-making!) Some conditions relating to mental health need some treatment using drugs and therapy, some sort themselves out with time, and some cannot be treated.

I think it comes down to whether you want to see homosexuality as we know it today, as either something that is intrinsically wrong, or alternatively, morally neutral - which is where I find myself. If it is really an evil or a disease, how do we cope with the fact that it naturally occurs in nature in so many different species. Most of us are unaware of this because we just don't spend enough time watching birds and animals and close our minds to it. And if it occurs naturally in nature, why would it NOT be expected to happen normally in our species as well? Are all these birds and animals, dreadful sinners, and perverts? No, they're just responding to God's call to be the best and most glorious bird and animal He called them to be, albeit perhaps tainted by our concept of the Fall. As Paul said in Romans 8: 22:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

So, you could use the word 'mutation or trait' as the third alternative. However, we need to be careful using that word 'mutation'. No-one wants to be called a mutant (because of its misuse in the Science Fiction genre), but to a degree we are all a result of mutation. An alternative word is evolution, but that is another loaded word to be bandying around in a Christian context, although most Christians really have no problem with evolution within a species – and many Christians now happily

embrace evolution of some type or other. On a point of interest, avoiding all the technical and hard to read papers:

- *“Mutation is a change in DNA within a single cell of a single individual. The majority of mutations happen in somatic (body) cells and cannot be passed on. Only mutations that occur in germ line cells (sex cells) can be passed on to descendants. Evolution is the change of genetics in populations over time. It is not a process of individual cells or individual life forms.” - Daniel Super*

From <http://www.quora.com> which is frustratingly now behind a login process rather than free to view, when I first wrote this.

I don't know what racial traits Adam had, possibly Mediterranean/Iranian, but he certainly wasn't a white European with brown hair, so somewhere down the line to me, a mutation/trait/evolution has occurred! All of us have been the result of some limited mutation, so we can perhaps debate how much God controls the mutation or evolution.

– Chapter 8 –

Being Gay or Lesbian, and being a Christian – some Bible problems

Having laid the background groundwork, there are passages in the English Bible that appear to say that gay or lesbian behaviour is unacceptable to God. Our job is to examine these passages and see whether what the Bible is referring to, is what we understand today as homosexuality.

However, before we get stuck in, let me make it clear that words and meanings change, even over a relatively short time. Did you know that until around 1875, men were able to do what they liked with their bodies, so, some men could be attracted to other men, to women, to children and to animals, and they would have been regarded as heterosexual, and most of these would go on to marry a woman and fulfil their normal social roles. Watch the full video “Kathy Baldock: Untangling the Mess - The Reformation Project in Los Angeles” on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziCOOdUW8OA>

So, with the idea in mind that words change, remember that we use English to communicate, the Bible writers were using Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, so translation between languages must also be considered.

Not only that, but speaking personally, I can't easily read English written 600 years ago, so how do we deal with a text written 2-3,000 years ago? In addition, there were things common to those living in the Middle Ages which are unknown today and vice versa (mobiles, tablets and drones). Fifty years ago, mobiles were decorations hung from ceilings, tablets were taken when you were ill, and drones were lazy workers, or honeybees that simply mated with the queen! Consider that some of the passages we will look at were written during the late Bronze Age.

As an illustration, I came across a comparison of Psalm 23 and how it has changed over the course of 1000 years. Please pardon this bit of fun to make a point:

Common English version (2011)

The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing.
He lets me rest in grassy meadows;
he leads me to restful waters;

New International version (1978)

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

King James Bible (1611)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters.

Middle English (1100 - 1500)

Our Lord governeth me, and nothyng shal defailen to me.

In the sted of pastur he sett me ther.
He norissed me upon water of fyllyng.

Old English (800 - 1066)

Drihten me raet, ne bytb me nanes godes wan.
And he me geset on swythe good feohland.
And fedde me be waetera stathum.

(The last three paragraphs:

http://thefoggiestnotion.com/1000_years_of_english.htm)

Some Bible passages are unclear. By that I mean they have more than one **acceptable** meaning. Look at Matthew 6:27:

²⁷ *Can any one of you by worrying add a **single hour to your life?** (NIV)*

And you will see there is a footnote that says: *Matthew 6:27 Or single cubit to your height.* Now turn to the King James Version, which says:

²⁷ *Which of you by taking thought can add **one cubit unto his stature?***

Is it length of life, height, or stature? All are correct, and we don't bat an eyelid because we are looking at the underlying sense of what is being conveyed. However, if we say that literally every word in the Bible is, and must be, precise and correct, we have a problem. The Source New Testament translation says in its footnote:

*Equally, "Which of you can add 1 cubit (18 inches/1 metre) to your height?" The semantic range of **helikia**, includes "lifespan" and "height". The semantic range of **rekhus**, includes "length", "time" (as in Psalm 39:5) or "cubit".*

Another example of this problem where passages are unclear, and the original meaning has been lost, are passages like Judges 1: 18, where the passage reads: *"Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron—each city with its territory."* The footnote tells us the Septuagint version says "Judah **did not** take ..." – a completely opposite meaning! In the scheme of things for us, no problem at all, unless you take a rigidly literal view of Scripture as being historically accurate.

So, if you are a regular reader of the Bible you should be used to some places where uncertainty occurs. In Isaiah 21: 8 the NIV uses the word "lookout" because it makes sense in the context (*And the lookout shouted, "Day after day, my lord, I stand on the watchtower; every night I stay at my post.*), but the footnote says the word in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Syriac and the Masoretic texts is "lion" – a very different meaning.

What we read therefore cannot literally be the very words that the characters, including God, spoke, because they didn't have secretaries writing with shorthand. As you know, the Gospels weren't written down until many years after Jesus returned to Heaven, so the authors tell us what they think was significant to them as they describe Jesus, his conversations, as best they can remember them, and His life with them. The Beatitudes take about 5-10 minutes to read, but we know Jesus was on the mountain, teaching for hours. What did he say? Presumably, it wasn't

that important, because the Gospel writers didn't record it. Likewise, when Jesus fed the 5- and 4-thousand people. We are told very little about what he said - maybe that wasn't very important either! I hope you recognise both those as tongue-in-cheek remarks!

When God met with Abraham and made a covenant with him (in Genesis 15), the process would have taken hours to complete (Choosing, catching and preparing the "heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon") and again we only have snippets of the conversation. What we read only takes a few minutes, so what we are told is only a summary of the important bits – the key elements of the message that tell us about God, and what He is like.

Language changes, so we need to be cautious how we use it. Translators do a brilliant and highly accurate job, but there are places where they look at all the available material (using lexicons, contexts, contemporaneous documents, etc), some of which may be contradictory, and give their best 'educated guess' in the context of the passage, and add footnotes saying, either, "Hebrew; Septuagint version says ..." or "the exact meaning here is uncertain." When we read a difficult passage, make sure you read the footnotes and always read it in multiple versions to get a flavour of what the underlying message is. We can therefore disagree with certain translations because they are human, not divine.

I am not saying translation problems and quirks explain all these passages we will look at – that would be very wrong, but each translator brings their own experience, understanding and educational and cultural bias, to bear – they can't help it, it's who they are, just as I bring my own understanding and experience to this document. To reduce bias, cultural or personal, groups of translators are used much more often nowadays, and this helps to improve accuracy of translation.

In the introductory notes to Zondavan's Today's New International Bible (Study Bible) 2002, they write: *"To achieve clarity the Translators have sometimes supplied words not in the original texts but required by the context. In a few instances, where some uncertainty about such material remained, it is enclosed in corner brackets"*. Most Translations will have similar comments, so this is not at all unusual or suspicious, but don't for a minute imagine you are reading word for word an updated copy of the original text, written down at the time it was spoken, especially as any texts that exist were written many years, and some, hundreds of years after the events they refer to. For instance, the books making up the oldest versions of the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy), that are currently in our possession were among the Dead Sea Scrolls which were written between 200BC and 200AD – 1200+ years after the Israelites left Egypt!

Translators make use of dictionaries and lexicons, but if these aren't kept up to date with documents found since the original writing of that dictionary or lexicon, errors can creep in, even though at the time they were written, they were thought to be accurate. They aren't seen as errors at the time they are written, but only when looking back with more up-to-date lexicons. However, each Bible translation reflects the world view, beliefs and mind sets of its translators, however sincere the

intent. It is inevitable, because they are trying to make the Bible accessible to that generation, and more than that, to a specific people group. So, for example, when the “Good News For Modern Man” Bible translation was first published in 1966, it was targeted at those for whom English was a second language. This version was later updated – no longer specifically targeted at those for whom English was a second language and became the Good News Bible/Good News Translation/Today's English Version – the same Bible but different names depending on where you are in the world. In the 1500's, Luther's translation of the Bible was written for the ordinary German at home and in the market-place. Tyndale's translation was aimed at making it possible for the plough-boy, the tradesman and women to read. Luther and Tyndale were not targeting the educated and learned. This is true for every translation – it will have a target demographic, usually the common person. Like it or not:

“Essentially all versions of the Bible are funded by religious organizations whose translators all follow a specific theological belief system. Their personal biases distort their work. In all this we ask God to guide our thinking, so that where we end up, is a position we can stand with confidence that we are honouring God”.
http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibi1.htm

If you take a literalist view of the Bible you need to learn Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic so you can read the oldest text in its original form. Then if you do that, as you learn about the languages, you'll probably lose your reliance on literalism!

Having said that, I am not undermining the Bible, but asking you to be open to read as much as you can about each passage, from multiple versions, to get a real sense of what this vital and vibrant set of Books is saying.

With all that, we need to look at some examples of what seem, to me, to be problem areas:

- I was brought up to believe that Jesus was a carpenter, but nowadays it seems the word translated as carpenter (τέκτων in Hebrew, pronounced Tekton) is more accurately described as a general builder – someone who is good with their hands, working with wood and stone. In a sense this isn't really that important on its own, but it just goes to show that our narrowing down in our understanding of scripture may be incomplete in some situations. People like the idea of Jesus being a carpenter because of the symbolism of being crucified on a cross of wood, but we must get away from believing stuff because it's nice. It's how bunnies and chocolate eggs at Easter, and Santa Claus at Christmas, have unthinkingly been accepted as part of the festivities. Facts are often inconvenient.
- Furthermore, it won't be a surprise, but I do not believe that God has literally placed every word, comma, and full stop in the English version of the Scriptures. That shouldn't be too scandalous, because the Bible wasn't written in English, but translations are made by humans, not God. When a sentence is translated from one language to another nouns and verbs are

placed in different places, and punctuation will be used, to make the sentence read correctly. And as we said just now *“Translators have sometimes supplied words not in the original texts but required by the context.”* Hence, if you compare all the English Language versions of the Bible, they will have a different number of commas, and a different number of sentences – that’s just how it is. So, whilst I don’t believe for a minute that God dictated everything to the Biblical writers, I **do** believe God was conveying His Word, His Message, in the Scriptures. So, I don’t believe in Biblical inerrancy, but do believe the Bible to be wholly trustworthy – that it is something I can aim to live my life by. We will revisit inerrancy again! However, I do believe that in places it is let down by its human authors or translators. But that doesn’t stop us from understanding God’s heart and message.

- There is no one, complete, original Bible, from which everything is sourced. It was a collection of scrolls and probably, until it was established what scrolls were regarded as canonical and what wasn’t, there weren’t many places where all the books were in the same library at the same time! As already mentioned, it is also true that the very first original documents, from which some of the books originate, no longer exist, and those we have are copies. Many books of our Bible are sourced from many different documents and fragments of different ages, and the truth conveyed in Scripture is sought from the various historic versions of the scrolls, parchments, and fragments. Even after saying that, I can have confidence in Scripture because the thread (perhaps spirit, or Spirit) running through the different documents remains consistent.
- As we have already made clear, some Christians as part of taking the Bible literally, like to believe in the absolute literal historicity of the Bible, but there is also a problem with that. Things like genealogies (for one) tend to kybosh that idea. Matthew and Luke both present a genealogy of Christ and both are different, because they are telling different stories. Matthew is producing a genealogy to show Jesus’ pedigree is stemming from David and that he is the promised “Son of David”, so the genealogy is neatly split up into three blocks of fourteen ancestors. Fourteen is important because it is numerically associated with the name “David” (D=4, v=6 d=4. Note that the Jewish writings have no vowels), and three is associated with God (Trinity). So, Matthew illustrates Jesus’ link with David and then with Abraham the founding father of the nation. In the meantime, Luke’s genealogy goes back, not to David, but Adam, because he is making the point that Jesus is the Second Adam and therefore not just the Lord for Israel, but everyone – every descendant of Adam. There are some wide differences between the two. Focussing on David, Matthew shows the line as: David → Solomon → Rehoboam → Abijah → Asa. Meanwhile Luke shows it as: David → Nathan → Mattatha → Menna → Melea. So, as I said, if we look at Scripture as

being an accurate absolute historical record, we have a problem, but if we look at it as conveying the message of God, there's no problem.

- As an aside, where the genealogy says that someone is the son of someone else, it doesn't always mean they were literally the son. There may be several generations between the two. For example, you have five generations of men in a blood-line: A, B, C, D & E. A is the oldest, with B his son, C his grandson, etc. From a Bible writer's perspective, it isn't unusual to write that E is the son of A. It isn't literally true, as we Western 21st Century Christians normally understand it, but it is true none-the-less. An illustration is shown in 2 Kings 18, when Hezekiah comes to the throne, the thirteenth king²¹ after David, and the passage reads:

³ *He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.*

Although Hezekiah was a distant direct descendent of David, we are probably talking as much about the spirit of David, because Hezekiah was a king who was focussed on God, especially in his early years – as David was.

- We can see some other problems when we read about the Plagues of Egypt:
 - Plague 1. We read in Exodus 7 verse 19: *The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.' Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone".*
If we take a literalistic view of Scripture, we are led to believe that every drop of water, including water stored in troughs, jars, and pots. But that's wrong, because not every drop of water was changed to blood, as we read a few verses later that Pharaoh's magicians did the same thing. Where did they get the clean water if it was all turned to blood? More interestingly we read in verse 24 that: *And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.* If all the water was turned to blood, why and how did they find clean drinking water, particularly as the source would have been the Nile itself? Presumably the 'blood' was some sort of silt that would be filtered out through the soil allowing short-term wells to be dug close to the river giving fresh water. Clearly, not all the water was turned to blood, because Pharaoh's magicians replicated the plague. The problem is the word 'everywhere' because we envisage it meaning every drop of water, and I don't believe that is the way we should interpret it. In the

²¹ Fourteenth, if you include Queen Athaliah, but she was Ahaziah's mother, who succeeded Ahaziah when he was murdered. She purged the royal family, but missed Joash, Ahaziah's son, who was protected and came to the throne when he was seven.

1980's we had riots "across the country" triggered largely by perceived racial issues and social deprivation. That isn't to say the whole country was rioting, but there were about 15 towns and cities where riots occurred "across the country" from Southampton to Edinburgh. Do you see what I'm saying? It was widespread, but not exhaustively complete.

- Plague 5. This plague killed 'all' the livestock. As we are told in chapter 9: *²If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, ³ the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses, donkeys and camels and on your cattle, sheep and goats. And then in verse 6: And the next day the Lord did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.* So, that's all livestock dead, right? Well not exactly, because when we come to
- Plague 7, the hail, we read from verse 18: *Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. ¹⁹ Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every person and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.'"* ²⁰ Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. ²¹ But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field. ²² Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt—on people and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt." ²³ When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; ²⁴ hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. ²⁵ Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields—both people and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. Add to that we also read in chapter 10, regarding the final Plague: ²⁹ At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and **the firstborn of all the livestock** as well.

I thought the livestock were already dead as a result of the 5th (and 7th) plague. Where did these come from? By way of contrast, there is a little comment in verses 31-32 that says: ³¹(The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom. ³²The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later.) We have an explanation here to tell us why not

everything was destroyed, but previous verses clearly say all the water, all the livestock, and every tree was affected or destroyed. Why do we get an extenuating circumstance here but not previously? I'll leave you to research those two questions, but I'm just highlighting the difficulty of crediting the authorship of every word of Scripture, to God. The author of Exodus isn't writing a forensic report about what happened, and when, but the story of God's dealings with people, so the style might be along the lines of a discussion between friends about how my football team stomped all over yours, "we thrashed you!", even though we only won 2 or 3-0. In my mind, we were just so much better we made you look like children. Winning is certainly not untrue, but there may be an element of rose-tinted spectacles. Our God is bigger and better than your god.

- While we look at Moses, look at the story of the Ten Commandments. Moses drops and breaks the first set, so must get another set. In Exodus 34 verse 1, God tells Moses that "I will write" them out again, but then in verse 28 we are told that Moses wrote them out. What happened there? Did God change his mind? "I know I could snap my fingers and the tablets will be as before, but time's not a problem, so you do it!" I don't see that as a problem, but literalists ought to, if there is any consistency to their thinking. Perhaps God also 'wrote' out the first set using Moses hands and chisel as well! God could have done it in a second, but Moses was there for forty days and nights – the same as the first-time round, so what was he doing all that time, if not getting busy with his chisel! Oh, and don't take those forty days and nights too literally either!

- In 1 Samuel 8 the Israelites come to Samuel to ask him to appoint a king:

⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷ And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

Also, in 1 Samuel 12: 16-18: ¹⁶ "Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes! ¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the Lord to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king."

¹⁸ Then Samuel called on the Lord, and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.

Those passages make it sound like God had forbidden them from having a King, and that they are rebelling against Him by asking for one. Yet, when we look at Moses farewell speech to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy, we read in chapter 17:

¹⁴ When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. ¹⁶ The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

That puts a different spin on it. God seems to be saying it was fine to ask for a king, so long as they fulfilled specific requirements, including letting God choose.

In Acts 13, Paul is speaking, telling the story of the nation. We read:

²⁰ ..."After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

So, no echoes of Samuel's criticism, simply reportage. If having a king was against God's Will, surely there would have been a critical remark made, like: "In their sin they demanded a king and God gave them Saul...". After all a couple of verses earlier in verse 18, Paul says: "*for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness*" – which was a criticism of the Children of Israel because of their behaviour in the desert. Hence you need to explain the apparent contradiction – was having a king planned by God, or against His Will? That's another one for you to work through.

Whilst looking at that, also turn to Judges 21: 25 which says: "²⁵ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit". This is the final verse in the book and the writer concludes that BECAUSE they had no king did whatever they wanted. Or as N.T. Wright described the writer's final remarks: "Wasn't it a good thing that eventually we got a king, because this was a real mess". (*Ask NT Wright Anything* podcast Episode 46 on Premier Christian Radio). So, the Biblical writer of Judges thought it was a bad thing that there was no king, because without one, people had run rampant. Was Samuel mistaken about the request for a king?

As we move on from Samuel, notice the interesting comment in verse 17, about not having **many** wives, it doesn't say he must have only one wife.

- While we are talking about contradictions/conflict between the Laws of Moses, I would draw your attention to Peter Enns' book "The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It" he talks about the Mosaic Law on pages 160/1 saying:

"Israel's laws don't behave as we might expect them to. Here are some examples, and I'm including chapter and verse to make it easier to look them up quickly. According to the Bible, these laws are all revealed by God to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.

Can Israelites keep their fellow Israelites as slaves?

Exodus 21: 2– 11: Yes, and the males can choose freedom after six years.

Deuteronomy 15: 12– 18: Yes, but both male and female slaves have the option of freedom.

Leviticus 25: 39– 43: No way, no how, are Israelites ever to be enslaved to each other. Remember, you were once slaves in Egypt. Hire them as laborers, but don't make them slaves. That's what foreigners are for.

Can Israelites eat the carcasses of mauled animals?

Exodus 22: 31 and Deuteronomy 14: 21: No. You're holy and that's disgusting.

Leviticus 11: 39– 40 and 17: 15: Sure, but you'll be "unclean" till evening. Make sure to wash your clothes.

Can a man have sex with a woman during her period?

Leviticus 15: 24: Okay, but if you do, you and every bed you lie on will be "unclean" for seven days.

Leviticus 20: 18: Absolutely not and no seven-day time-out, either. You and the woman will be "cut off" (perhaps death or excommunication), because this sort of thing is no different than having sex with your sister or aunt.

Where exactly are we allowed to offer sacrifices to God?

Deuteronomy 12: 13– 14 and Leviticus 17: 1– 8: Only in one place, in God's sanctuary. Don't even think about sacrificing anywhere else.

Exodus 20: 24– 26: Wherever you want. Knock yourselves out. You can build an altar of earth, but if you want to use stones, make sure they aren't carved with a knife. Also, don't have steps going up to the altar, lest your nakedness be exposed.

How do we celebrate properly the Passover meal?

Exodus 12: 8– 9 and 46: Make sure you roast the Passover lamb (and whatever you do, definitely do not boil it or eat it raw) and eat it at home.

Deuteronomy 16: 7– 8: Boil the lamb and eat it only in the central sanctuary.

These are just a few examples, but they are enough to make the point: Israel's laws sometimes contradict each other."

I'm grateful for his work in highlighting those passages. If God dictated the Bible, didn't he know what he was doing? I'm convinced the Bible was written by men who were inspired by the God they knew, not by God himself. God is Sovereign, so I believe it is us who are faulty, in the way we regard, and interpret the Scriptures.

- Balaam is an interesting character. His story is told between chapters 22 and 24 of the book of Numbers. He was an itinerant prophet from Aram Naharaim, in modern-day Syria, living in Moab at the time the Israelites were passing the territory. It is an odd story because he seems to know God as Yahweh – the same as the Moses. As the Moabites were afraid of the Israelites, the Moabite king, Balak, wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. Throughout the narrative Balaam is cautious, saying he can't just say anything but needs to enquire of "the Lord my God", referring to him as Yahweh (or YHWH, the God of the Israelites)

In Numbers 22: 20 we are told: *"That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you".* The next day Balaam goes with the Moabites in line with God's instructions, but we read in verse 22: *"But God was very angry when he went,..."*. We then get the story of the talking donkey – read it for yourself. At the climax, Balaam sees the angel who tells him in v32 that: *"I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me."*³³ *The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now"*. A bit harsh, in anyone's book, especially when he was only doing what he was told!

Ironically, the angel then tells Balaam he should continue his journey providing he only says what he is told to say. When he meets Balak, the king, he tells him he can only say what God tells him to say, although the king wants him to curse Israel. Three times Balak asks Balaam to curse the Israelites and each time we are told that either "The Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth" or "the Spirit of God came on him and he spoke his message." So, where did he go wrong?

Balaam may have been a "prophet for hire" but we are told he sought God and spoke His blessing over the Israelites each time he was required to curse, so I therefore have a fair degree of sympathy for him. He tries to do things in the right way but seems to be condemned by several Bible writers (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11 and Revelation 2:14), without really explaining why. Perhaps some of the other traditional Trans-Jordan stories about Balaam not recorded in the Bible explain why. We certainly know of an Aramaic inscription in Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan from the 8th Century BC which refers to

Balaam. Anyway, superficially, concentrating purely on the Biblical text, there are some inconsistencies with the narrative. He had an unfortunate end, being killed by the Israelites when they attacked the Midianites (Numbers 31) just before Moses dies.

- Ruth. Hands up if you ever thought she'd get a mention in this essay! My reason for mentioning her here is that in Deuteronomy 23: 3, we read: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation." Ruth was a Moabite who was initially married to Mahlon, the Israelite son of Naomi. She later married Boaz and became the great-grandmother of King David. Taking Deuteronomy at face value, David should have been barred entry to "the assembly of the Lord" but was instead chosen by God and regarded by Him as a "man after my own heart" (Acts 13: 22). You could also perhaps argue that because David's great-grandmother was a Moabite, David shouldn't even have been king (Deuteronomy 17: 15) but I guess in a patriarchal culture, the matriarchal side of his family didn't count! God is Sovereign after all. But it all makes you wonder whether God believes in his own laws in Deuteronomy. What do you think? I have no problem, but you need to work it out for yourself. Maybe that provides some additional grist to the mill of quoting Deuteronomy 22: 5 against those who are transgender? Where's the consistency?
- Israel's hero David asks Joab to "*count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are*" I Chronicles 21: 1-15. The story is a parallel telling of the story found in 2 Samuel 24: 1-17. Joab doesn't like the assignment, because it is repugnant to him, so he counts all the tribes, bar Levi and Benjamin, I guess to make a point. Six chapters later, presumably the same author writes in I Chronicles 27:

²³ David did not take the number of the men twenty years old or less, because the Lord had promised to make Israel as numerous as the stars in the sky. ²⁴ Joab son of Zeruiah began to count the men but did not finish. God's wrath came on Israel on account of this numbering, and the number was not entered in the book of the annals of King David.

If you take every word of the Bible literally, this passage *must* present a huge problem if you treat your faith with any credibility. The Bible says that David did not take the census and places the responsibility on Joab. But the Bible also says that David DID order it, pulling rank on Joab to ensure it got done, and seventy thousand people died because of it. Sorry, it can't be swept under a rug. (While here, compare 2 Sam 24:9 & 24 with 2 Chron 21:5 & 25)

What can we make of this retelling of the story? It's not even a different author in a different book – it's the same scribe, who's barely had time to let the ink dry from the first telling of the story. It's a lame explanation at best. Joab was an important military figure for David, so why would he waste his

time on a head-count unless the king had commanded it? It was a huge waste of his talents for close to ten months according to the Samuel version. Even the commentaries struggle with this telling of the story. Let me quote from the Oxford Bible Commentary:

*vv 23-4 are an extremely artistic attempt at twisting the story of the census (ch. 21) to grant David forgiveness for his deed. According to this chapter David forces Joab to carry out the census. Joab, however, fearing the Lord's word, does not include Benjamin and Levi. This passage contains no explicit incrimination of Joab, but (implicitly) exonerates David by making him follow the rules laid down for censuses in Num 1 (vv. 2-4). He counts only those men who were older than 20. The Chroniclers justification for this way of proceeding 'for the LORD had promised to make Israel as numerous as the stars of heaven' (cf. e.g. Gen 15:5), is nevertheless inappropriate here. If this were true, the significance of those over 20 would be lost. **The passage, to a certain extent, remains a mystery.** [My emphasis]*

The commentary writer seems to flip-flop between the two passages in the explanation, so you need to read it slowly, and then read it again! In addition, the I Chronicles 27 version says 'the number was not entered in the book of the annals of King David', and yet it WAS recorded by the writers of both Samuel and Chronicles – even if they don't agree!

In the 2 Samuel 24 version of the story Joab reports that there are eight-hundred thousand fighting men in Israel and five hundred thousand in Judah. In the Chronicles telling, there are eleven-hundred thousand in Israel and four-hundred and seventy thousand in Judah. I'll leave you to start your wriggling gymnastics as you explain all the different variances, including those I haven't covered here. (Also compare 2 Sam10:18 with I Chron19:18)

- We are brought up to believe that Josiah was a great king who purged Israel and Judah of their idols. He was made king when he was seven or eight-years old, helping to restore and cleanse the Temple so that worship of God could resume. During the restoration work on the Temple, the Book of the Law was found, so it was read to the people, following which they were asked to pledge their loyalty to God. You can read the story here: 2 Kings 23 & 2 Chronicles 34 – 35. Now turn to Jeremiah 3: 6-7 & 9-10, which says:

*⁶During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. ⁷ I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. ...
⁹Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. ¹⁰In spite of all*

*this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, **but only in pretence**,” declares the Lord. [My emphasis]*

What’s going on here then? The book of Kings paints a glossy picture of complete reform, including the remnant of the Northern Kingdom, Israel and the southern Kingdom Judah, over whom Josiah was king. This is more than echoed by the writers of 2 Chronicles. In fact, that book reports: *The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah, with the priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem. [2 Chronicles 35 v18]*

So, whilst some Biblical writers are describing a huge turning to God in Josiah’s time, Jeremiah is telling us that no, you’ve got it wrong. Despite the warnings, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria nearly 100 years earlier because of their idolatry, and Judah simply hasn’t learned from the experience, but continued in their idolatrous ways, and pretended to follow God.

- When reading the history books of the Old Testament you must take care because where the same story is repeated in two books (Samuel and Kings, or Kings and Chronicles) you will frequently find factual details differ. For example, when Solomon builds the Temple, he creates a huge bowl of water (a Sea) 14 metres in circumference. The story is in 1 Kings 7:23-26 and 2 Chronicles 4:2-5. In the 1 Kings passage it can contain 12,000 gallons and in the 2 Chronicles passage, 18,000 gallons. In the 1 Kings passage, below the rim, “gourds encircled it—ten to a cubit”, but in the Chronicles passage “figures of bulls encircled it—ten to a cubit”. Which is right? Both accounts agree that the Sea rested on the backs of 12 oxen in teams of three facing outwards. As you read the books in parallel you’ll find many other inconsistencies.
- Let me show you a couple of other passages, which some may regard as a contradiction, but I regard the second passage as simply being euphemistic. It occurs with the story of Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah, reigning in Jerusalem who was taken with his subjects into exile in Babylon. In 2 Kings 24: 10-12 we read:

¹⁰ At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, ¹¹ and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. ¹² Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. ... ¹⁵ Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon.

However, in 2 Chronicles 36: 10 we read: *“In the spring, King Nebuchadnezzar **sent for him** and brought him to Babylon, together with articles of value from the temple of the LORD, and he made Jehoiachin’s*

uncle, Zedekiah, king over Judah and Jerusalem”.

If one takes a literalistic view, there is a contradiction: in one instance there is a siege, with Nebuchadnezzar knocking on the door, subsequent conquest and imprisonment, and in the other a response to a “request” with no clear hint of military involvement, and Nebuchadnezzar seemingly tucked up safe at home in Babylon! As I said, I just see it as a euphemism, or understatement, similar to saying David made sure Goliath was unable to get back up again, or Aaron’s comment that “Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” – as if by magic!

- You could also look at the practice of Levirate marriage, because although Leviticus 18: 16 forbids a man from having sexual relations with his brother’s wife, Deuteronomy 25: 5– 6 specifically commands this to happen when a man dies without having a son. Clearly some laws are not inviolable but are in place to protect families and communities. In this example, within marriage, the brother’s wife having sexual relations with her husband’s brother, would break the marriage, but in the event of her husband’s early demise, joining with her husband’s brother in marriage, brings protection from poverty, as well as the chance of honouring her first husband’s family line.
- Just in case you are tempted to think that the Gospels are free of difficulties, they are not. I could pick out several instances, and several books have been published on the subject, but if you look at the story of the cleansing of the Temple which is reported in every Gospel, (Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 2), you will see that Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us it happened immediately after Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. However, John seems to say it happened earlier in Jesus’ ministry, just after He changed water to wine. The cleansing of the Temple certainly didn’t happen twice, so which Gospel is right, and which do we toss out as a lie. We could get rid of John, because if he is wrong about this, maybe he’s wrong about other things. That would be silly and naïve. Another story that illustrates the problem of contradiction, is the story of Judas’ suicide after betraying Jesus. In Matthew 27 (3-10) he is described as throwing the money back into the Temple, and hanging himself and, in Acts 1 (vv18-19) Luke records Judas as using the money he had received to betray Jesus, to buy a field, where “*he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out*”. So, both what happened with the money was different, and the respective methods of death were different. The stories can’t both be right. If you take the Bible as a reliable accurate historical record, your boat has sprung a leak. Obviously, if you take a view where the books are not dictated by God/Holy Spirit and instead are written by humans inspired by God, there is not much of a problem. The books are telling different stories in different ways, and they are never intended as legally binding historical records - each has its own valuable message told in a slightly different fashion.

- Near the beginning of this document I also mentioned Jesus healing the demon-possessed man/men in Mark 5: 1-17, Luke 8: 26-37 and Matthew 8: 28-34. Was it one man, as reported by Mark and Luke or two, according to Matthew? You decide. Which writer played fast and loose with the truth?
- Where did (Simon) Peter and Andrew come from? Mark 1: 21, 29 cf. John 1: 44
- Earlier we briefly mentioned how Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11 talked about how long hair for a man was disgraceful, yet throughout history prior to this point men had long hair and the Nazarites (John the Baptist being one) were not permitted to cut their hair, and Jesus very likely had long hair by today's standards. So, clearly, Paul was addressing a cultural issue that applied at the time – he cannot have been making a proclamation applicable to all-time. Absalom, you will remember, was referred to in glowing terms in 2 Samuel 14, because of his long hair – though it didn't finish well for him, because of that hair! And Elisha was ridiculed for his baldness (2 Kings 2), and bad things happened to the kids who mocked him. Besides, who decides what length is 'long'? Clearly that is a culturally subjective question.

I realize I have strayed into the area of Biblical Inerrancy, which the church has debated for centuries, and committed Christians hold various valid views. I have come to realise that my own view is that Jesus is the true Word of God; and that while the Bible is a treasure without value for me, it does not hold an equal standing to Jesus. The Bible is a library of books written by men inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, but not dictated by Him. To value the Bible too highly is to make it an idol, and I believe many Christians have unthinkingly done this. Having said that, I still can't throw away an old Bible, however battered it has got!

A short while back I had been talking about translation issues but, for many of us who have no background in this area, this doesn't mean much, so let's use an illustration. Turning to my/your computer, when translation software is used to convert a document from one language to another, errors will occur. In the early days of BabelFish and Google Translate, some of the errors were very funny. Then as people learned more and the software improved, the translation got better, but it is only as good as the information about context and usage given it. If you translate word for word you can get huge problems. For a bit of fun let me give an example. In March 2015 I received an email written between two Austrians talking about some remarks I had made. Obviously, it was in German, but the comments were intended to be passed on to me. I was curious because it related to some work I had done, and I knew the guy was indirectly writing to me, so I used Google Translate to make sense of the email.

If you understand German, you'll enjoy this extract:

Ich bin froh, wenn meine Arbeit gut lesbar war, inhaltlich wird sie dann mein Professor noch korrigieren. Es motiviert auch zu hören, dass mein Englisch gut ist, ich war nämlich nie ein besonders guter und motivierter Englisch-Schüler

It was translated as:

I am happy if my work was easy to read, the content they will then correct my professor yet. It also motivated to hear that my English is good, I was in fact never a particularly good and motivated students English

Clearly that is a very poor translation (the previous paragraph of the email was much worse, but as it was more personal, it isn't appropriate to include it here), but you can understand the basic intent of what he was saying, which was all I was interested in.

In 2020 it translated as:

I am happy if my work was easy to read; my professor will then correct the content. It is also motivating to hear that my English is good, because I was never a particularly good and motivated English student.

So, we see the huge improvement in automatic translation over 5 years, though it's still not expressed in the way a native English person would write.

Before any reader gets excited that I may be saying Bible translation is similar to using Google Translate or Babelfish – I am not. I am simply using it as an illustration to make a point about literalist word-for-word translation, and how inadequate it is, and therefore what a good job, Bible translators do, to make it sound authentic in a second or third language.

So, what do we learn? Translation is largely a skill of interpretation, getting in the mind of the original writer to understand the ideas being conveyed, and re-phrasing it to make the text read freely and naturally to a different group of people in a different culture, possibly even changing or adding a word here and there, to correctly convey the meaning to those people in that cultural environment. As we have said, translators do a great job, but problems will creep in especially if your lexicon of words and meanings is not complete. Most translators will agree their lexicons always need updating as new historic documents are uncovered. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls helped enormously in the verification, clarification and translation of many books. Since then, many other religious and ordinary day-to-day documents have been discovered. What is the importance of the day-to-day documents? It's simple, where a word is used in both Scripture, and an unrelated document, you can get a sense for how that word is being used and what it therefore means. So, it is important that if we find a strange word in Scripture and we find it again in another document or two, you can build a picture of how to use the word and what the writer is communicating.

As Charles Hodge wrote in his Systematic Theology (and referred to in his Notes section by Matthew Vines in "God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships"):

"It is admitted that theologians are not infallible, in the interpretation of Scripture. It may, therefore, happen in the future, as it has in the past, that interpretations of the Bible, long confidently received, must be modified or abandoned, to bring revelation into harmony with what

God teaches in his works. This change of view as to the true meaning of the Bible may be a painful trial to the Church, but it does not in the least impair the authority of the Scriptures. They remain infallible; we are merely convicted of having mistaken their meaning." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1871), 1: 59.

Did you notice that date? It sounds like it could have been written in the last few years but was written 150 years ago!

The blogger Ian Paul (describes himself as: *Ian Paul: theologian, author, speaker, academic consultant. Adjunct Professor, Fuller Theological Seminary; Associate Minister, St Nic's, Nottingham; Managing Editor, Grove Books; member of General Synod. Mac user; chocoholic. Tweets at @psephizo*) wrote the following on his blog about how we interpret the Bible:

"Human language can never unambiguously convey human meaning; even in conversation with people we know, we often think 'Now, what did she mean by that?' This is especially true of writing which, like the Bible, originates in particular times, places and cultures, and these are now at a distance from us. Language functions at a number of different levels. Words have ranges of meanings (often called the 'semantic range'), but the range of meaning of a word in one language will never exactly match the range of meaning of an equivalent word in another. The English 'have' can mean 'to possess,' but it can also mean 'obliged to' (as in 'I have to leave now'). The French 'avoir' has some overlap with this, but is also used in descriptions of age ('J'ai trente ans') which do not carry over into English. It is an act of interpretation to decide which part of the semantic range a word means before we can even translate into another language.

Words also carry meaning by making reference within a particular cultural context, and when read in a different cultural context, that meaning needs interpretation. If Jesus is 'the good shepherd,' what does that mean in an agrarian (as opposed to a post-industrial) context? And what does it mean in the context of other biblical language about shepherds? Words and language also communicate by means of their impact, which might shock, startle, surprise or reassure, and discerning this impact is another act of interpretation. Finally, words communicate by their very shape and sound, particularly in poetic writing. This is why some translators choose to focus on the meaning of words (in 'literal' or word-for-word translations), others focus on more contextual questions ('dynamic equivalent' translations) whilst still others focus on impact (paraphrases like Eugene Peterson's *The Message*)". <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-to-interpret-the-bible/>

Whilst talking about Ian Paul, I came across an article on the Christian Today website about a booklet he had written, called, "How to Interpret the Bible: Four essential questions" (Grove) which is an extended piece based on several of his blogs, and is well worth reading. It provides us with some help about how to make consistent sense of what we read. In the article (<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/how.to.explain.the.bible.without.explaining.it.away/127638.htm>) writer Mark Woods talks about how many of the miracles of Jesus are explained away. By way of example, some will claim that Jesus' walking on the water didn't really happen and that Jesus walked on a sandbar. He says:

Being able to interpret the Bible is key for anyone who wants to take the Bible seriously, but how does the 'ordinary' Christian do that with integrity?

His four 'essential questions' are not such that any serious student of the Bible would quarrel with. They are, What kind of writing? (reading for genre), What did it mean? (reading in context), What does it say? (attending to content), and What part of the story? (reading the canon).

The first question shouldn't be controversial, but it often is. It's obvious, he says, that Genesis 1 isn't a science textbook – but all too many Christians assume it is and are pinned to a literalist account of creation. And how do you read apocalyptic books? In Revelation, John 'has a message to help them live in their first-century context rather than offering an "end-times timetable" for the distant future' – but again, without a clear understanding of genre, this is exactly what a lot of conservative Christians have ended up with.

'Reading in context', stresses the importance of including background historical and linguistic knowledge, whilst 'attending to content' requires us to give really close attention to the text, using all the tools available, and finally 'reading the canon' demands that we fit a passage or text into the bigger picture of Scripture.

I hope that piques your curiosity, and if you want to look at the blogs on which the booklet is based, you can start here: <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-to-interpret-the-bible/>. Better still, buy the booklet!

After all that, let's not think there is just one acceptable view of reading Scripture. I realise you may be unhappy with that, but we can't speak to Moses or to Paul and say, "Is this what you were trying to say, or were you saying something else?" I am also saying we must be committed to taking the Bible seriously and may not simply dismiss it.

If God literally dictated every word, there would be a common style to reflect the personality of God, throughout every book, but there isn't. Besides which why would God dictate the book of Psalms – a whole book of emotional outpouring - - and address it to yourself! It seems a bit weird or Narcissistic to be writing praise

songs, to and about yourself. So, God has allowed each writer (David in this instance) to express their own individual personality through their writing – therefore it isn't **dictated**, but **inspired** by God. Sometimes I am inspired by God, like many Christians, but unlike the Biblical writers I don't bring a new vision or understanding of God. I believe each Biblical writer had a personal experience of God and, indeed an on-going relationship with Him, and wrote under that inspiration. However, that doesn't make their words inerrant. However, for me, inerrancy comes in the form of **Jesus**, and He was God's Word, as we know from the beginning of John's Gospel, and He was also the fulfilment of earlier Scripture. **He**, as God's Word to us, **is** inerrant. As Steve Chalke has frequently commented: "The Word of God is a person, not a book", which is the teaching of all the New Testament writers - *the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us* - John 1: 14. Also, in Revelation 19: 13, we have the Rider on a white horse with the Name: King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who John describes as: ... *dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God*. Once again, the **Word of God** is a person, not a book.

So, to get back to basics, behaviour that flies in the face of the character of Jesus is not of God. Jesus set aside some of the Mosaic teachings, and strengthened others, and said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14: 9. So I would say that I believe God's Word (Jesus) to be inerrant, but the library of many books – the Bible, to be inspired, though not inerrant. Some folks will now want to stone me!

As Rachel Held Evans writes:

*The life and teachings of Jesus, then, embody all that these laws were intended to be. **Jesus is what the living, breathing will of God looks like.** This includes compassion for the poor, esteem for women, healing for the sick, and solidarity with the suffering. It means breaking bread with outcasts and embracing little children. It means choosing forgiveness over retribution, the cross over revenge, and cooking breakfast for the friend who betrayed you. As Elton Trueblood put it, "**The historic Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ does not simply mean that Jesus is like God. It is far more radical than that. It means that God is like Jesus.**"²²*

Rachel Held Evans. *Inspired* (pp. 55-56). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

At the time Jesus lived, his Bible was the Old Testament, which I understand, had only finally been recognised as canonical, a relatively short time before his birth. The books of the New Testament weren't recognised as Canonical until about 400 years later.

²² Elton Trueblood, cited in Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 114.

While the early church was growing, there were many letters being sent between the churches, some of which became part of our Bible today, and some didn't. The test of authenticity for each manuscript was:

1. Was the book written by a prophet of God?
2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God?
3. Does the message tell the truth about God?
4. Did it come with the power of God?
5. Was it accepted by God's people?

There is a helpful article about who decided what was included in the New Testament here: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/who-decided-what-went-into-the-bible.html>.

Interestingly, not everything that Paul wrote, made the cut, so his letter to the Colossians was included but his letter to the Laodiceans, (referred to in Colossians 4:16) didn't. Maybe it was lost, or maybe it was thought not to add anything to what was already being thought of as Scripture. Whatever the reason, the fact that some of Paul's writing didn't make it into the canon of Scripture is fascinating, because Peter regarded all of Paul's writing as Scripture: 2 Peter 3: 16:

*¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the **other Scriptures**, to their own destruction. [My emphasis]*

So, it begs the question, if it was Scripture, why didn't it get included? And did Paul think of his own writings as Scripture? Sorry, just being mischievous.

You will know Paul wrote to Timothy saying: "¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." At the time that was written, there was no formal New Testament, and Scripture, for them, would have been the Old Testament, and an indeterminate number of letters in circulation in the early church, some of which would have been regarded as Scripture by some, but not by others. The argument continues today where the Roman Catholic church recognises up to 15 books of the Apocrypha, while most Protestants don't. However, the Greek Orthodox have even more books. I was going to try to quote exact numbers but in researching the issue, found that different sources quote different numbers for both the Catholic church and Orthodox church, and they talk about Apocryphal books and Appendices, and as it was getting confusing, I'm backing away from being precise! Needless to say, different Christian churches have different ideas about which books are to be regarded as sacred, although each one will be adamant in its own choice, and of course, my own tradition will be correct! Many of you know that Martin Luther wanted James dropped from the canon of Scripture, because of his teaching about 'works'.

While writing about the history and formation of the Bible as we know it, it is appropriate to make the comment that a good friend of mine made, when he read the many pages of an earlier version of my musings:

[The] problem is that there's all this stuff in the Epistles which needs to be explained in some way, and the way that most liberals are explaining it is to say that it doesn't really mean what it says. Now here's my problem: if it's that important, and if the NT really is the word of God, why hasn't he done a better job of making sure it got handed down and translated properly? And what is the point if only some really clever people can understand and explain it all to the rest of us? What happened to "the common people"?

I struggle to give an appropriate answer because his comments are quite valid. For many years, here in the UK the Bible could only be read and understood by those running the church. Monasteries would be responsible for copying sections of the Bible and sending them to churches for their use. It seems that not every church would have a complete Bible (let alone the members – unless they were rich enough to have bought some scraps!), and may have had to make do with sections, or memorised fragments. It was Henry VIII who commanded that 'one book of the whole Bible ... in English' should be placed in every parish church. It was this that led to it being possible for any person who wanted to, to read a Bible.

Perhaps we can make the point that maybe if we have the Spirit of God in us, we only really need the Bible to **confirm** God's guidance, because we have it written on our hearts when we turn to Jesus:

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people ...
"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.
"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Extracts from Jeremiah 31: 31-34

I would also argue that for somebody embracing faith for the first time, the Bible is a valuable book of teaching, especially, and importantly, when assisted by others of mature Christian experience.

Christianity came to these shores in the 3rd or 4th Century AD, with the Romans. It is likely to have been brought by some of the soldiers as well as Roman traders. Some sources put it even earlier - around 43AD, but for the next one and a half millennia all that was available by way of written text, were parts of Scriptures, and gradually collections of these scraps and books within major churches.

It wasn't until the Authorised/King James Version was published in 1611 that it eventually became possible for every family to own their own copy of the Bible, though this would take a long time to happen.

In a sense, today we have more resources available to us than Christians at any time in history, but God's message is still let down by our human frailty, and tendency to read Scripture through cultural lenses, but I guess that has ever been the case. In terms of resources, we have the Bible in many languages; and in some languages, scores of different translations. Archaeology is turning up many documents that help us understand words the Bible writers used, as well as artefacts used at the time of the Bible writers, so we know what things looked like; and we have many scholars writing helpful Bible Dictionaries, Lexicons, Commentaries and Encyclopaedias. It is a rich time for us. Except.... except that the lexicons used by Bible translators are very much out of date as I understand it, because the archaeology is providing more new additions to future lexicons than can be collated and published.

So, what about that question: *What happened to "the common people"?* Why didn't God make it easier to understand and interpret? I'm going to duck that as I think that's a question for someone cleverer than me. I'm sure that in the final analysis, God's assessment of our lives will be based on people's response to the light they have seen. For my part, I can only respond to the light I have seen and try to shine my light in areas where there is not enough light and too much heat. I hope I can do this without adding to the heat, but that will also depend on the spirit of the reader.

When I write about Paul, please don't think you hear me saying he was wrong. My line is that we need to be certain we translate his words accurately, not inadvertently comparing apples with pears. We must try to understand the exact issues he was addressing, not try and make issues from one culture directly transfer to another, especially if there is clear doubt. When Paul was writing, he was writing to a specific group of people in a specific place, at a specific time, with specific issues – he wasn't writing to people who weren't going to be around for another 2,000 years, in languages that hadn't been invented yet! There is no way he had any idea people would still be reading and avidly dissecting his letters some 2000 years later - in every possible language. Some of his writings indicate he thought the end of the world was near, so if he had known his writings would still be analysed today, he might have written things very differently. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can apply his teaching to many of our situations today, but we can't do that all the time. For example, we see slavery as appalling, but Paul never encouraged slave-owners to free their slaves. Why not? That would have been what we would think of as the Christian thing to do. However, I do recognise that Paul *did* encourage those slaves who had the opportunity to become free, to take it, because he writes in 1 Corinthians 7:

²⁰ Each of you should remain in the situation you were in when God called you. ²¹ Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it

*trouble you--although **if you can gain your freedom, do so. ...**²³ You were bought at a price; **do not become slaves of human beings.***

And, in Galatians 5: 1, Paul writes:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Although Paul tells the Corinthians not to become slaves of human beings, he doesn't make a big thing about it. It is almost an aside, given his commencing comment of "Each of you should remain in the situation you were in when God called you", and you can almost hear Paul slipping in the word "ideally": *Ideally*, do not become slaves of human beings. He doesn't, but there is no proper condemnation of what we regard as the evil of slavery. In fact, in the context of Galatians passage, he's not directly talking about physical slavery as we view it but drawing out the importance of our commitment to God, as being of far more importance, since we have been bought at the price of Jesus' death. He is saying that whatever our social standing might be, in Christ, we must be united, seeing each other as equals, and not allow human divisions and status, pull us apart. So, Paul isn't offering a comment about slavery, as such, other than to say it's better not to be a slave, and from the Galatians passage, if you are free, don't become a slave. Although he's talking spiritually there, it isn't a stretch to apply it physically. Having said that, in the instance of Onesimus and Philemon, Paul does try to change the relationship of slave and master, to brothers in the Lord.

To be fair to Paul, he does list slave-traders in his vice-list of 1 Timothy 1: 8-10, but this was probably because of their abuse and cruelty to their slaves, rather than because of the trade itself, of which, he makes no specific condemnation.

Just now I made the comment that Paul thought that the end was near. It may have been in his mind, that as Christians were being persecuted and killed in horrible ways, slavery would be done away with very soon anyway. That is pure conjecture on my part!

I hope I'm being fair, but whereas we would shout and protest about the evils of slavery; because it was so much a part of his culture and civilisation, Paul doesn't seem to have seen it as a real problem to address right now. It seems to have simply never occurred to him, from what we can read. Indeed, when Paul is talking about the difference between being a slave to sin and a slave to righteousness in Romans 6, he uses the expression in verse 19: "*I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations.*" Slavery was an accepted part of everyday life. As we read throughout the Bible, slavery is frequently spoken of in negative terms, but nowhere is there any concerted theology to remove the scourge of slavery. Maybe Paul didn't like slavery, but it was too big an issue for even him to resolve.

Slavery has become a huge issue recently, but slavery hasn't just been Africans taken to the Americas. Every country in the world has practised slavery at some time. Though we might be unaware, British (Anglo Saxons) were taken as slaves, or

sold into slavery, by the Vikings, but it is too long ago to remain in the cultural consciousness. We all have blood on our hands. Even Africans enslaved other Africans. In Biblical times, conquering armies always took people as slaves.

In a sense we just see slavery as a single issue, but I suspect that in reality it was far more complex. Yes, you have captives sold as slaves, but you will also have the small family where times have become hard and they have run out of food, and there isn't enough money to buy any more food, and they have the chance to sell a child to a rich family as a slave. The child will be fed, and the family gets some much-needed money to buy food, and they don't need as much food now with one less mouth to feed. What is the right and wrong? If the child stays, it may be one or more die of starvation. Maybe the family isn't broken up, but offers themselves as a family in service. This situation was foreseen in Leviticus 25: 39-46 where the author writes:

³⁹ "If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves. ⁴⁰ They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you; they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. ⁴¹ Then they and their children are to be released, and they will go back to their own clans and to the property of their ancestors. ⁴² Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.

⁴⁴ "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. ⁴⁵ You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. ⁴⁶ You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.

It was therefore fine to have slaves – providing they weren't Israelites. So, if we take the Bible at literal face value, why do we see slavery as wrong? If God wrote every word in the Bible this is a problem, isn't it?

We have used the expression "Mosaic Law" or "Law of Moses", but when were they actually written? Different scholars will select different dates, depending on when known manuscripts were dated and collated, but, if Moses authored them it would have been around 1450-1410BC. However, there were several other Ancient legal codes set up by the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, and Sumerians (amongst others). The most well-known legal code is the Code of Hammurabi. This is a well-preserved Babylonian code of law of ancient Mesopotamia, dating back to about 1754 BC, when the sixth Babylonian king, Hammurabi, was ruling, and seems to have some strong parallels to the Mosaic Law (compiled perhaps 300+ years afterwards), sometimes even in phrasing. There is one famous example of a similarity, between the two legal codes, and that is the law demanding "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", but there are others. It may well have been that as

Moses was a very well-educated man in the Egyptian royal family, he was aware of the contents of the Code of Hammurabi and used it as a basis for the laws given in the Torah. However, there are significant differences between the two:

- The number of laws regarded as absolutes, were ten (10 Commandments) for Moses, and 282 rules for Hammurabi.
- The Code of Hammurabi had scalable punishments depending on whether you were a slave, a freeman or citizen. The Mosaic Law made no such differences, so everyone was treated the same, whatever their perceived rank in society. Social equality (though not gender equality) was quite radical for what was a late Bronze-Age community.
- In addition, the Mosaic Law saw crimes as being against God, where the Code of Hammurabi saw the crimes as being against society, so though there might be some crossover, in content, there is a very different emphasis. Some might be tempted to make the point that I am saying the Law of Moses is a cultural crossover, rather than a 'revelation' by God. Maybe the revelation was in the emphasis, and the idea that God was central to every aspect of life, not just when it suited.
- In Christian Piatt's book, "Banned Questions From The Bible", David J Lose makes the point that "*the Israelites ascribed the Ten Commandments to God, and by doing so portrayed God as being deeply concerned with human welfare.*" The Code of Hammurabi has no such divine source, but Prince Hammurabi guaranteed protection for his people if they kept the law.

I don't know how Moses recorded his conversations with God, and how accurately, but given the society and culture of the age, his Law was proportionate and, in some ways, different to what had come before. To illustrate this issue of recording what God said, I have a problem with my previous literalist view of the Bible, that when Moses received the 10 Commandments from God up the mountain, God also gave him a whole lot of extra stuff about making the Tabernacle, altars, furnishings, ceremonial garments, who can be Priests and all the other things covered in Exodus 25-30 inclusive. Did he write it down? On what? When he comes back down, we are only told of the two tablets of the Law written on both sides, which Moses smashes on the ground. There is a lot about this we don't know, but if it were vital, I'm sure God would have made certain it was covered. To be fair the Torah (the books of the Law) has both an oral and written tradition, so it is likely that initially the Law was in an oral form which was written down later, and I'll ignore the obvious issues that creates. So, maybe the two tablets Moses smashes were just the key, Ten Commandments.

We have talked about language, translations, World Views, and the way we view history. The word 'homosexual' didn't exist in the English language until the late 1800's, so when we see it used in the Bible, we have to be sure that the original text is referring **exactly** to what we understand as being gay or lesbian today. By that I mean two consenting adults in a committed monogamous and loving relationship. I use the word 'exactly' because it is important. Let's say the text describes something relating to homosexual dominance or rape, and it simply gets

translated as 'homosexual behaviour', that creates a significant problem. Please be aware that the Bible only talks about homosexual **behaviour**, it doesn't address **orientation** or **attraction**. One would expect the Bible to be against **any** form of rape, yet if the translated text implies that God is against the gay or lesbian, rather than the intended homosexual rape, we have a problem. I am not saying this is what has happened, but simply using an illustration to highlight the issue. It would be dishonourable to then justify it by saying, "well it doesn't matter because God is against the gay or lesbian anyway". I think in legal terms that would be described as "the fruit of the poisonous tree". Not only would it be dishonourable, but you criminalise a group of people God may not have anything but love for. I'm therefore counselling caution in how we use language.

To state my case up front, in my view, I believe that what the Bible is referring to, that has been translated as 'homosexuality', is same-sex **behaviour** that is violent or exploitative because that would fit far better with the tenor, tone and context of Scripture, **and** more importantly, the character of God.

"There is no term that means homosexual orientation in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of the Bible. The authors of the Bible did not understand sexual orientation and thus did not write about it. Thus, when you see one of these words in an English translation of the Bible, it is important to dig deeper and find what the original Hebrew or Greek text really means." —http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibi.htm.

As I've yet to see anything to cast doubt on that, I'm happy to go with the above, since it is entirely consistent with what I understand to be the Character of God.

So, the use of the word 'homosexual' dates from relatively recently, and Wikipedia indicates: *"The first known appearance of **homosexual** in print is found in an 1869 German pamphlet by the Austrian-born novelist Karl-Maria Kertbeny, published anonymously, arguing against a Prussian anti-sodomy law."*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality>

Hence, we must, to some degree, trust the integrity of translators, that when they use this word, they believed this was the correct phrase at the time they were doing their work, and not simply expressing their prejudices, or the prejudices of their publishers. However, as we will learn in chapter 11, when the RSV was published in 1946, the translators mistakenly used the word homosexual, and this led to other translations following the lead, so in my mind there is a question mark hanging over this issue, but we'll look at this in more detail later on. The use of the word 'mistakenly' is deliberate, and has been proven, as I'll show in a later chapter.

I am not a Greek/Aramaic/Hebrew scholar, so I must trust what others write about the original text. **The question will therefore be: the translator has used the word homosexual here. Are they describing what we understand "homosexual" to mean today: that of two consenting adults in a committed and loving relationship? If not, what is he describing, and is there a better word or phrase?**

By way of background, and to partially answer the question, when the Yale University translators were using that word, they were referring to what we consider to be **abusive** homosexual behaviour. The 1940's/50's was the period in America when McCarthyism was rife, and people were scared about communism. Gay men got caught up in the societal panic of the day and people were scared of them. They were seen as secretive perverts and child molesters and because of this they were thought to be ripe targets for communist blackmail and intrusion. Hence when the translators were looking for a word to use, they settled on the word "homosexual".

Even with that background knowledge, and my limited reading, I have found scholars disagreeing profoundly about the meanings of the original language. So, what do I do? The easy answer is to stick with what I know and leave it to others to resolve. I can't do that. You already know I am minded to accepting the gay or lesbian behaviour within certain constraints already outlined at the beginning – essentially the same real constraints I have for heterosexual behaviour! So, what makes most sense to me is to look at the whole tenor of Scripture and see where the common thread runs. Jesus summed up the law and the prophets like this:

- Matthew 7: *"¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"*.
- Matthew 22: *"³⁶Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"*.

And Paul summed up the law like this:

- Romans 13: 8-10: *⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.*

In my typically longwinded fashion I would sum up Scripture along the lines of the fact that all of the behaviour code throughout Scripture requires us to love and honour others. Anything that does people "harm", as Paul has just said (theft, violence, murder, adultery, lying, gossiping and cheating – and there will be others!), is totally unacceptable to God. It will be this filter I will use if the passage is genuinely and honestly unclear.

It is also appropriate to include a quote here by American Orthodox Rabbi Shmuley Boteach:

"Homosexuality and sodomy are not ethical sins. No one is being hurt, no one is being cheated, nobody's rights are being infringed upon.

Homosexuality is a religious sin, analogous to other Biblical prohibitions, like not eating the carcass of a dead animal, or not sleeping with a woman during her menstrual cycle."

To a degree this goes back to what I was saying earlier, that I have a problem with the traditional church stand against being gay or lesbian because when you take the whole tenor of scripture and try and apply the principles, it is difficult to see quite why God would be so dead against gays and lesbians. They are not hurting or harming anyone; indeed, you can easily argue they do much that is very good and loving and have a huge influence in many areas of culture. Once again, I am not using that as a theological justification, because salvation is by God's Grace, but as a contrast, because pretty much every sin harms or hurts someone else in some degree. Look at one of Paul's vice lists in Romans 1: 29-32, where each of these vices affect others in some way, in stark contrast to what we see in today's homosexuality.

In Matthew 12 Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees who watched to see if he performs a healing on the Sabbath. We are told that:

¹⁰ ... Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

¹¹ He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Though a simplistic reading of the Law said it was wrong, Jesus says that it is lawful to do good, whenever, and it is very wrong to fail to do good.

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is saying he believes it is not an ethical sin but a religious sin – I disagree that it is even that, but fair enough. However, he makes the point that the sin isn't against a person, but against God. I guess it's like our eating of unclean meat, which we do all the time in the west. Here's some unclean food we eat: rabbits, pigs, catfish, lobsters, crabs, shrimp, mussels, clams, oysters, squid, shark, etc. (There are many others, but that's a good start.) So, if it's a religious sin, why don't we ignore it like we ignore all the other religious sins? If we don't regard eating of unclean animals as sin, why do we regard homosexuality as a sin? And, if it *is* a 'religious sin', it is no worse than many other sins. In churches, we see plenty of anger, which we mistakenly label 'righteous' because we claim the same justification as motivated Jesus when clearing the Temple. Maybe there is an element of anger underlying this essay as I see people being treated unfairly by the church universal. We get angry over all sorts of issues, from the grand to the petty, but we always justify it as being 'righteous'. However, from our perspective, in a different culture, living outside the parameters of the Jewish faith, we would say the Rabbi perhaps misses the point (note: he wasn't writing to Christians, but addressing Jews) that in the Christian Scripture there is no separation of religious and ethical sins. We simply call it 'breaking God's Law' - sin. However, we live under the forgiveness of Grace, but we haven't learned to show that same grace to others. It's very similar to The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matt 18: 21-35.

– Chapter 9 –

The “Clobber” passages – Genesis and Leviticus

As we look at the Bible, we will be looking at Genesis 1, 2 and 19, Leviticus 18:19-22 and 20:1-18, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 and Jude 1: 7. We may also look at a few other minor passages. Collectively these are referred to by the LGBTQ+ community as the “Clobber” passages. It’s so sad that God’s Word has become a weapon to beat people with. Although it’s correct to show people where they have gone wrong, if they have indeed gone wrong, we must be absolutely certain, and make sure, we don’t have a plank in our eye, as we remove the speck from someone else.

My own feeling is that there are times that both the faith and LGBTQ+ communities are in the wrong: both seem to shout at the other without making much effort to try and listen to the other side. This is especially true of the ‘evangelical’ and ‘established’ type churches, who in a blinkered approach, refuse to engage with the issue as they think everything is cut and dried. This results in increased hurt by those seeking healing and increased hurt results in increased bitterness and rhetoric. Although I am critical of the non-affirming Christian church, of which until recently I had been a part for around sixty years, I have tried not to be unnecessarily inflammatory, and if you think I haven’t been careful enough, please be gracious and forgive my unintended passion in places.

To my mind, the correct attitude is to examine Scripture thoroughly and to then have a discussion with those you disagree with. Discussions require an equivalent time listening, to talking. If you think certain behaviour is wrong, go and talk to them and find out why they think differently to you, and only then seek to explain exactly *why* you think they are wrong, but be prepared to listen - it can be talked about in love and compassion, but not with a megaphone in one hand and stones in the other. This is my intent, which I hope I have lived up to in this piece.

Genesis 1 & 2: - This is the creation story you will be familiar with where the Bible records how God set about creating the Universe, and within that, the solar system including the Earth, the Sun and Moon. It goes on to describe the creation of life on earth, finally finishing with the creation of Adam and Eve. There are two different versions of the story, which we’ll look at in a moment, but this isn’t really a problem because each story has a different focus. For me, as I have already explained, I do not see much significance in the Bible making no reference to being gay or lesbian either here at the beginning of time or through the period of history covered by the Bible writers. If sexual orientation is something they have no concept of, why would they? That doesn’t mean that what we refer to as homosexuality didn’t exist, just that it wasn’t very important.

I don’t hold to a literal Creation that occurred 6,000 years ago – to me, it now seems unjustifiable. The fossil record along with rock ages, formations (including the time it takes to form rocks), and erosion, together with the known time it takes to form stalagmites and stalactites in deep caves, would tend to kick that idea into

the long grass. In addition, when you look at stellar distances and how long it takes light and radiation to reach us from distant galaxies, just adds to the notion that this 4/5k-year timeframe before Jesus, is bonkers. My own thinking leads me to accept a God who creates, but not in the traditional limited scope. Recent scientific studies in our solar system, seem to be going in the direction of declaring that organic life existed on Venus, Mars, Titan, or on one of Jupiter's moons in the past, which will be a game-changer to the once traditional Christian Creation model where created life can only exist on Earth, and no-where else. In addition, NASA's Cassini spacecraft visited Saturn's moon Enceladus in 2015, swooping to within 49km (30 miles) of the icy body's south polar region. It passed through the liquid plumes which originate in its sub-surface ocean. (Details taken from http://www.theregister.co.uk/2015/10/29/cassini_enceladus/) The plumes contain complex organic molecules ejected from salty ocean under the surface ice giving rise to a possibility of life being found within the ocean. (<https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/news/13148/complex-organics-bubble-up-from-ocean-world-enceladus/>) However, no life has yet been found outside the Earth, but our creation model will no doubt have to be re-evaluated at some point. I guess I would place myself somewhere within the grouping of "old-earth creationist", "theistic evolutionist" or "evolutionary creationist" – depending on whose convincing case I have been listening to most recently!

There are still a few Christians who argue the 'young earth' theology, but not, to my mind, with any degree of credibility, and I think that though most Christians will believe in Creation and the two Creation stories of Genesis 1 & 2, each will have their own understanding, because there is no solid theology tying the Creation story to any kind of scientific reality, because Genesis isn't telling that story.

As for my own thoughts as I try and tie science to Scripture, I consider there may have been life on Earth, possibly even including up to and including Cro-Magnon man and God chose to create a new version which included a spirit – God's breath inside. Perhaps God chose a couple within an existing tribe. But I may be completely wrong about that! God is outside time, so what seems like an eternity to us may seem like a heartbeat to Him, and vice versa. One problem with the 'young earth' theological position is the story of God creating man. "How's that?" you say. Genesis talks about man being created from the dust of the ground. What is dust? **Dust** is made up of granules of rock powdered by erosion or friction, small amounts of plant pollen, textile fibres, soot, dead human and animal cells, minerals and other microscopic components. The dust and soil we have today, took millennia to form. **Sand** can be made from quartz, corals, volcanic rocks – pretty much any rock you can find, that has had time to be weathered and broken down into small fragments. **Soil** is made up of sand or other minerals and organic matter, and other components, and will differ depending on local conditions. What we are describing is the result of many millennia of processing, and in a literal 'young earth' creation story, the soil simply wouldn't have existed at the beginning. It is reminiscent of the argument mentioned much earlier about God creating a tree, and the tree-rings showing it were 50 years old, even though it had been

created mere minutes earlier. Why would God create a false impression – it is against his character. Anyway, the Creation-Evolution debate is for another day.

Some people like to point out that in the beginning God didn't make anyone gay or Trans, and that He only made male and female. I'm sure that given the flavour of what you've read so far, you'll see how shallow that line is. How far would Creation have got if God had made two men or two women? It's a foolish comment.

Genesis 1: 26-27: - *"²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, ... ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ³¹.... and it was very good."*

I am only quoting this passage here for completeness. Under the Trans section earlier I wrote:

Scripture teaches that God made woman for the man, and man for the woman. It was to be a way of procreation, commitment and relationship. I have previously indicated this was God's creation plan, which became tainted by sin, and there is no way to put the genie back in the bottle. We are where we are, perhaps sadly, but this will all be put right when we get to heaven, where one's gender won't matter a ha'porth, because Jesus says there will be no marriage or giving in marriage. Not sure about that? Take a look at Luke 20: 34-36: -

³⁴ Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels."

The point of the passage is not that God created male and female. The point is that we are all created in the image of God. That is the big take-away! In a sense, we get very exercised about the issue of gender and sex, and my gut feeling is that God is less bothered than we think about sexuality, since eternity is a long time and gender is only of any use during our lifetime. I think what truly bothers God is our **behaviour** when we use and abuse other folks physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and yes, definitely sexually.

Genesis 19 (with a little of chapter 18 thrown in for context!). This is our family favourite story of Sodom and Gomorrah! Speaking personally, everything I was taught in church was that the sin here was one of homosexuality. (And an article I read yesterday continues to make this assertion.) However, since I started looking at the gay issue, it is clear this passage is not talking about homosexuality, as you will see when we look more closely. Indeed, there are some things about the story I cannot believe I didn't spot before, given I have been in the church for so many years, and must have read the story countless times. I was probably over-familiar with it, and just didn't take it in. Let's look at the issues, and these well-written pages will really help you with the background:

http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibg.htm

<https://resources.christiangays.com/03-the-sin-of-sodom-genesis-19/>.

Quoting from that second web page (Christian Gays) we read:

"When homosexuality is named as the sin, or one of the sins, of Sodom, that's a claim that's staked on something other than what's actually written in the Bible about the place because throughout both the Testaments there's an abundance of references to Sodom's sin and none of them imply or specifically tag homosexuality as one of them. The sin(s) of Sodom provided in the biblical text are:

- *Idolatry - Deuteronomy 29:17-26; 32: 32-38*
- *Murder, greed, theft, rebellion - Isaiah 1: 9-23*
- *Mistreating the poor, arrogance - Isaiah 3: 8-19*
- *Adultery, deceit by priests and prophets, pride of the heart, idolatry - Jeremiah 23: 10-14; 49: 16-18; 50: 2-40 [Is it significant that there are so many verses, and none have a sexual element. – PJ]*
- *Cruelty, failure to care for the young and poor – Lamentations 4: 3-6*
- *Pride, greed, laziness, mistreatment of the poor and needy, haughty, abominations* - Ezekiel 16: 49-50*
- *Oppression and mistreating the poor - Amos 4: 1-11*
- *Pride - Zephaniah 2: 8*
- *Living after ungodliness - 2 Peter 2: 6*
- *Fornication, going after strange flesh - Jude 1*

There are four other mentions of Sodom in the New Testament by Jesus. Three times Jesus referred to the city within the context of inhospitality [...] and another time Jesus compared the suddenness of the coming of the Kingdom of God with the suddenness of the judgment that befell the time in the time of Noah and the land of Sodom. In all three passages Jesus says nothing about the exact nature of Sodom's sin".

* The word 'abominations' here does not necessarily mean anything sexual – it is often the word chosen by the writers of the KJV, but in more modern versions the word used is 'unclean' – which is less emotive. To us living in the West in the early 21st Century, we see it through a lens of sexuality and debauchery. As <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hombibg193.htm> says:

"The Hebrew word "to'ebah," translated here as "abomination," was used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) to refer to various ritually impure acts, such as Hebrews and Egyptians eating together, Hebrews eating lobster, shrimp, or snakes, sacrificing an animal in the temple that contained a blemish, women wearing men's clothing (e.g. pants [PJ –'trousers' to those of us outside the USA!]), a man remarrying his former wife, etc."

Remember Daniel spoke of 'the abomination that causes desolation' in Daniel 9: 27; 11: 31; & 12: 11 and also Matthew 24: 15 & Mark 13: 14, which is thought to be the sacrifice of a pig on the altar of the temple. So, 'abomination' is unlikely to have any sexual element. Did you notice how a man remarrying his former wife is Biblically regarded as unclean, or an abomination in old language. The original text is in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but it is echoed in Jeremiah 3: 1: - ¹ "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers— would you now return to me?" declares the LORD". This shows that this principle remained in place throughout Israel's history from Moses to Jeremiah and many subsequent years. Many people today, both outside the church and inside, would regard it as a good thing if you returned to your former spouse, regarding it as 'Romantic'. However, in Biblical terms, I suspect that it is unclean in the context that she may have been someone else's wife in the interim, but it may be the idea of accepting someone/something that had previously been rejected as worthless. We will talk about wives being regarded as property and resulting attitudes to property elsewhere.]

I need to make one further comment about that Ezekiel passage mentioned above. Let's take a closer look at Ezekiel 16: 46-57:

⁴⁶ Your older sister was Samaria, who lived to the north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you with her daughters, was Sodom. ⁴⁷ You not only followed their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they. ⁴⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.

⁴⁹ "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen. ⁵¹ Samaria did not commit half the sins you did. You have done more detestable things than they, and have made your sisters seem righteous by all these things you have done. ⁵² Bear your disgrace, for you have furnished some justification for your sisters. Because your sins were more vile than theirs, they appear more righteous than you. So then, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

⁵³ "However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them, ⁵⁴ so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all you have done in giving them comfort. ⁵⁵ And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before; and you and your daughters will return to what you were before. ⁵⁶ You would not even mention your sister Sodom in the day of

your pride,⁵⁷ before your wickedness was uncovered. Even so, you are now scorned by the daughters of Edom and all her neighbors and the daughters of the Philistines—all those around you who despise you.⁵⁸ You will bear the consequences of your lewdness and your detestable practices, declares the Lord.

A couple of chapters later, in Chapter 23, Ezekiel is again using the picture of two sisters, called Oholah and Oholibah to refer to Samaria and Jerusalem. They are described as prostitutes, and Oholah is the older sister guilty of chasing after her lovers, defiling herself with the idols of everyone she lusted after. Then from verse 11 he writes about Oholibah (Jerusalem), saying:

¹¹ "Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet in her lust and prostitution she was more depraved than her sister. ¹² She too lusted after the Assyrians—governors and commanders, warriors in full dress, mounted horsemen, all handsome young men. ¹³ I saw that she too defiled herself; both of them went the same way. ¹⁴ "But she carried her prostitution still further. [...]

¹⁸ When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her naked body, I turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister. ¹⁹ Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. ²⁰ There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses. ²¹ So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.

Did you notice that both references make no reference to homosexuality? In Ezekiel 16 the only conceivable expression, using our 21st century Western cultural bias, that has a perhaps sexual connotation was 'detestable practices', but as we mentioned, this expression is the word "to'ebah," and its meaning is explained more fully shortly, but certainly we can't define it as anything even vaguely related to homosexuality. However, I'm drawn to this passage because Ezekiel is saying that Jerusalem's depravity exceeded that of Sodom (and was twice as much as Samaria) and there has never been any hint of ritualised homosexuality in Jerusalem, although I'm sure there was, because they adopted so many of the Canaanite practices. So, if Jerusalem was guilty of far worse practices than Sodom, were they homosexual? The history of Jerusalem, which is pretty complete, doesn't record it, so I have to ask those who hold a traditional thinking of this story, to explain yourselves.

In addition, did you notice that verse 53 from Ezekiel 16 saying that God "will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters"? How does that get reconciled where the traditional narrative claims Sodom was wiped out because of the total depravity of their homosexuality? Sodom being blessed by God and being restored – Jerusalem being worse than Sodom? I'll leave that with you, because with your own integrity, it must raise questions.

I mentioned the term 'detestable practices' just now. If you refer back to Ezekiel 7 & 8, you will see how Ezekiel uses this expression. The expression is used in ch.6: 3, 4, 7 & 8; and in chapter 8, he simply uses the word, 'detestable' in verses, 6, 9, 15 & 17. Chapter 8 makes it quite clear that the issue that was so offensive to God, was idolatry. Almost certainly there were fertility rituals being practiced, and I'm sure this was all part of the offence, but Ezekiel is clear that God was most offended by the worship of idols. Idolatry is a big theme for Ezekiel throughout his book, and you will see it time and again, through its pages. In chapter 16, we read:

*¹⁷ You also took the fine jewellery I gave you, the jewellery made of my gold and silver, and you **made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.** ¹⁸ And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them.*

[Emphasis mine]

This is almost a picture of the women making elaborate dildos as god's they could worship, and with which they could engage in sex. Not that different to today, where vibrators are commonplace, and we develop sex robots to satiate our need to worship at the idol of sex.

Many Christians see a parallel between the destruction of Sodom, and God's supposed judgement of Homosexuality, so how do you square that with another passage further on in Ezekiel 16, where God blesses Sodom:

*⁵³ "However, **I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them,** ⁵⁴ so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all you have done in giving them comfort. ⁵⁵ And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, **will return to what they were before;** and you and your daughters will return to what you were before. ⁵⁶ You would not even mention your sister Sodom in the day of your pride, ⁵⁷ before your wickedness was uncovered. Even so, you are now scorned by the daughters of Edom and all her neighbors and the daughters of the Philistines—all those around you who despise you.*

This is peculiar language if we are talking about male homosexuality. In Ezekiel 23 Oholibah is described as 'depraved', and frequently people read 'homosexuality' into a passage where this word appears. However, we can see a much more straightforward use of this word in this passage. Sodom, as a city, was not regarded as 'depraved' though many of the people were, because 2 Peter refers to the "depraved conduct of the lawless", but it is clear from the context that Peter wasn't referring to homosexuality. Twice Ezekiel calls Jerusalem depraved (Ezekiel 16:47 & Ezekiel 23:11)

The recurring sin of Jerusalem has always been idolatry, even in the time of Solomon. (The first reference to other gods is in Solomon's time – 1 Kings 11: 3-10.) The sin that has always exercised God is idolatry, not homosexuality. Indeed, such is the extent of Jerusalem's depravity, that Ezekiel says Jerusalem makes Sodom look righteous by comparison. So, you clearly can't read in the word 'homosexuality' in place of 'depravity' or 'detestable practices'.

So, what does Jesus say about Sodom? Bearing in mind that He and the Father are one, if God has judged Sodom for its sin, anything Jesus has to say about it, is significant, because He was there. When Jesus, who is God in human form (“He who has seen me, has seen the Father.”) talks about Sodom, it is in the context of a lack of hospitality. Jesus doesn’t talk about homosexuality, and if anyone should know, it should be Jesus! In fact, when Jesus talks about the days of the Son of Man coming without warning, He says “[As] in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.” (Luke 17: 28-29.) He doesn’t talk about any sexual perversion, but simply that life was pretty normal, just like everywhere else – “People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building”.

So, going back to our closer examination of Sodom specifically, we can make the point that so far, homosexuality doesn’t get a look-in. To summarise the Religious Tolerance site, it talks about the following:

- Jesus implied that the sin of the people of Sodom was to be inhospitable to strangers - Matthew 10: 14-15 & Luke 10: 7-16. In fact, when Jesus sends out his disciples, he says it would be better for Sodom and Gomorrah at the Judgement, than for the people of any villages who fail to offer hospitality to Jesus’ Disciples.
- Looking at the Jude reference the site adds that “*Jude disagreed with Jesus and Ezekiel; he wrote that Sodom’s sins were sexual in nature. Various biblical translations of this passage in Jude describe the sin as: fornication, going after strange flesh, sexual immorality, perverted sensuality, homosexuality, lust of every kind, immoral acts and unnatural lust. It looks as if the translators were unclear of the meaning of the verse in its original Greek, and simply selected their favourite sin to attack. The original Greek is transliterated as: ‘sarkos heteras.’ This can be translated as ‘other flesh’. Ironically, our English word ‘heterosexual’ comes from ‘heteras.’*”

A likely interpretation is that the author of Jude v4 criticized the men of Sodom for wanting to engage in sexual activities with angels. Angels are described in the Bible as a species of created beings who were different from humans. The sin of the people of Sodom would be that of bestiality.

Edited from <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hombibg193.htm>

My personal difficulty with that would be, how the people of Sodom would recognise them as angels when Abraham didn’t, a short time earlier. Something may have been said or done that indicated this, but if so, it isn’t recorded. Anyway, we only have the words that have been written, so we deal with them.

Looking at that first point made by the web site, where Jesus said it would be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for an inhospitable town or village - doesn’t that seem strange? If you regard homosexuality as sinful, and yet Jesus says being inhospitable is worse, you’ve got a problem. We’ve all been inhospitable at some

time(s). In my reading of the passage, it seems to be that in both instances' hospitality was the issue, but because the disciples were going out specifically at the command of Jesus/God, and as His representative, refusing them hospitality would be like refusing hospitality to Jesus/God himself, so would be an order of magnitude worse. I also think Jesus is creating an interesting parallel: the villages who turn away Jesus' disciples will be condemned for a lack of hospitality because of the significance of *who* they reject; Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned for simply being inhospitable.

So those are the main passages throughout the rest of Scripture that refer to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and give reasons for their destruction. Now let's really examine that Genesis story more closely, because there are some elements of the story I would like to highlight.

In Genesis 14 we have the story about the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah getting involved in a battle with marauding armies, during which, Lot is captured. Lot wasn't a fit man, as we will find out shortly, so I doubt that he would have been in the fighting. So, I imagine Sodom was invaded, and Lot was taken as part of the collateral damage. Abraham and his men rescue Lot and the others captured by the raiders. Verse 16 says: *"He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people."* At this stage Sodom sounds like any other town and I must highlight the fact that the passage mentions Abraham rescues the women. If Sodom was as rabidly homosexual as I'd been taught, why would the king of Sodom be that bothered about the women? Indeed, he asks that they be given back. They would have little or no sexual function, and probably abused – nothing more than property or slaves, so Abraham would have been seen to have been morally merciful if he had retained them among his own people. So, it doesn't really stack up that Sodom was a 'pit of homosexuality' – it just sounds like any other common, recently conquered, town, with no mention whatsoever of any sexual sin.

Interestingly, at the same time as Abraham is returning the captured bounty to the king of Sodom, he meets with Melchizedek king of Salem, who offers him bread and wine in the presence of the king of Sodom. Melchizedek was priest of God Most High, and there are lots of references about Jesus being in the order of Melchizedek (See Hebrews). Surely *if* the king of Sodom was so repugnant, Abraham would have known, or Melchizedek would have made a remark, or given a call to repentance, but no unusual remarks are made. Alternatively, given the esteem with which he is held, Melchizedek would have waited till the king of Sodom had left, and then made his entrance, presenting the bread and wine. But it doesn't happen that way. Strange.

In chapter 18 we see Abraham meeting with God and two angels. From verse 17 onwards it is clear that God had already decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of these towns therefore had nothing to do with the behaviour of the people towards the angels, because that hadn't yet happened, as they had yet to visit the town. There is no evidence that attempted, or actual, homosexual rape

had happened before. Having recently been conquered they may have been the **victims** of homosexual rape by the conquering armies, as happened frequently at the time, we simply don't know. So far there is no evidence the men of Sodom engaged in any unusual sexual or homosexual practice, so we can't insert anything more into the story than we have been told. It is bad theology to base one's thinking on something that isn't written about.

In chapter 19, I must ask several questions:

- Why would the people want to attack the angels? Many writers suggest that this was not a question of homosexual rape, but more a question of ritual humiliation. As mentioned, it was far from uncommon that after a battle, the victors would rape the defeated, especially their leaders, to show dominance and power over the vanquished. In prisons, even to this day victims can be gang raped to exert dominance. The people of Sodom had been defeated a short time before, and here were some strange people coming into town with no apparent explanation. That doesn't make it any the less unpleasant, but it might present an alternative narrative. Those of you who have watched Game of Thrones, will have seen ritual humiliation depicted. Even if it was homosexual rape, this is hugely different from the consensual and loving relationships we are addressing. Rape, whoever is involved is always wrong. Consensual sex is a wholly different issue.

- Who gathered outside Lot's house? To quote from <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hombibg192.htm>:

"The KJV translation is ambiguous. The first part of the verse talks about 'the men of Sodom,' -- that is, a male group. The second part talks about 'all the people,' -- presumably men, women, and children. The NIV implies that Lot was faced by an all-male mob consisting of every man and boy in Sodom; no females of any age were in view. The ambiguity appears to be due to the phrase in the original Hebrew that is transliterated as 'anshei ha'ir, anshei S'dom.' It can have two meanings. It can mean 'men of the city, even the men of Sodom.' But it can also mean 'the people of the city, the people of Sodom.' It appears that the KJV and NIV translators ... chose a translation that would make the mob all male. The author of the original Hebrew text may well have intended to say that everyone in Sodom -- men, women and children -- were there".

If it was literally every man (or person) in Sodom, how could Lot hold them off on his own, given the violence we assume was in the air? We will come back to this question about who was gathered outside, in a moment.

- Why did Lot offer his daughters to be gang raped? This is deeply unpleasant, but it's in print so we deal with it. Lot had been in the city a good while and should have been able to understand the thinking of his fellow citizens. If he knew the mob was bent on **homosexual** rape, he would

not have offered his daughters, because he would have known the mob would have had no sexual interest in them. The fact he did offer them his daughters, points to the fact he thought the mob would have been satisfied to rape them and leave the angels alone – however unpleasant that is. But that, by definition, is NOT a homosexual mob, but a heterosexual one. Let's reiterate that, if homosexual rape was the way many unknown visitors were treated, that may feed into the lack of hospitality the Bible talks about, and therefore to be condemned, BUT homosexual rape doesn't mean that homosexuality is wrong, in the same way that common heterosexual rape, doesn't make heterosexuality wrong. **Rape** is the big evil, regardless of sexuality. Sexual violence is always wrong, and should always be condemned.

- What about the pledged husbands of Lot's daughters? There doesn't appear to be anything particularly different about these men, yet it seems likely they were not gay. Lot would have been very aware of the need to keep the family line going, so even if they had been pledged for years, Lot wouldn't have allowed both daughters to have married gay men – even if they were culturally obliged to procreate. The Bible makes no specific statement about their sexuality, so it seems safe to assume they were straight. If they had been gay in the way we understand it, they would have had little interest in marriage. Verses 12-14 say:

"¹² The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here--sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, ¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking".

On the one hand, we are led to believe that **all** the men of the city are gathered outside his house, yet the angels ask whether Lot has anyone else in other parts of the city belonging to him. Lot then goes out to find his sons-in-law to warn them the city is to be destroyed and to get out – presumably by their own means. In a sense, the fact that the sons-in-law didn't believe him is immaterial but may say something of the general character of the people, and why God decided to wipe them out. There is something strange here: if they were part of the mob, Lot would have had an awkward conversation, having just offered their future wives to the mob. Also, if they were part of the mob, what were they doing? Did they do anything to save their future wives? It therefore seems unlikely they were part of the mob, given the context, and the fact that there is no indication that the angels blinded them. Have you tried to find someone in a crowd? Lot seems to know exactly where to find his sons-in-law, and goes straight to them, so, given the angels comments, they were likely to be somewhere else

in the city. Incidentally, if they *had* been blinded, they wouldn't have been able to escape by their own means.

On the other hand if Lot's sons-in-law were not part of the mob, it is likely there were a good number of other men who were not involved, so maybe life in other parts of the city was going on as usual. Did they even know of the attack on Lot's house? If they knew it would happen/was happening, surely, they would have wanted to protect the family they were betrothed to or go into hiding in case they were dragged into things. Yet Lot seems to have known exactly where to find them. The more you look into it; the more questions arise. Perhaps, far from it being a huge crowd, it could have just been a relatively small group that, in modern parlance, were on their way home from the pub, or rustled up the local troublemaker or gang leader, who had seen men he didn't recognise; or alternatively, they could have been the equivalent of religious extremists. Possibly in that context, Lot **could** have held them at bay, on his own, as Scripture seems to indicate!

- If there **had** been a huge heaving crowd outside his house, Lot's exit to go and find his daughter's betrothed husbands might have been more difficult, even with the mob's blindness. If it was a small group of men and boys out for trouble, though now blinded, it would have been easier to slip away.

I therefore suspect the passage is more likely to have meant that 'Some men of the city...' or 'Some people of the city...' I certainly can't see a sensible case being made for the whole city being homosexual – it really doesn't stack up.

Undoubtedly there would have been some gays or lesbians, but probably no more prevalent there, than anywhere else throughout history. The reasons for the destruction of these towns have already been outlined from the other passages in the Bible, we've listed earlier. On that subject, if we insist the people from Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed for being gay or lesbian, aren't we making the other Old Testament passages out to be wrong or lying?

- Lot doesn't appear to be very 'righteous' yet the Bible refers to him as a righteous man! (See 2 Peter 2: 6-9.) What is it that makes Lot "Righteous"? This story has Abraham seemingly negotiating and getting God to agree not to wipe out everyone, but to save the righteous - the definition of Righteous is interesting in this passage, because Lot can hardly be described as righteous in our understanding. If Lot can be regarded as righteous, then many people we hesitate about, can also be regarded as righteous. God will be the Judge one day, not ourselves!

Finally, on this passage, God had already decided the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, well before the angels visit, so the behaviour of the men had no determining factor on the outcome. It is simply a window into that state the culture had descended to. God certainly wouldn't have spared the city if they had taken Lot's daughters and raped them, in accordance with Lot's offer. So, the crime here isn't homosexuality, as I hope I've shown. By way of a parallel or context, read Judges 19 and compare it to what we have just read. We'll look at it more closely elsewhere.

As I read the story, Lot strikes me as being very unfit and I can almost picture a portly man grown comfortable in having all he wants, and one who is unsuited to running away, because verses 19-20 say:

"¹⁹ Your servant has found favour in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. ²⁰ Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it -- it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

Although he eventually does go and live in the mountains, the impression of Lot being a bit portly isn't diminished by the fact of him getting so drunk he is unaware of his daughters getting themselves pregnant by him on two consecutive evenings. (That's an impressive pregnancy success rate – two for two! Few can claim that!)

From where I stand, there is nothing in this passage that clearly relates to the gay or lesbian we see in our society. If the idea of the passage was to condemn homosexuality, you would expect several clear unequivocal references to it in the text, and you *wouldn't* therefore expect all the other Old Testament passages (listed previously) to quote every sin **other than** homosexuality as the reason for the Judgement.

I hope that helps. Let's move on.

There is one more issue I need to mention that doesn't get a lot of attention, and that is the "spilling of seed" and yet it probably impacts the issue more than any other single thing. The significance here is that until 1860 it was thought that the woman was only an incubator for life, and that the male semen contained everything a baby was to become. They didn't understand about eggs, so spilling of semen was seen as the destruction of life. The main story we need to look at is back in Genesis 38: 6-10:

⁶ And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. ⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." ⁹ But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰ And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also.

From its beginnings, the Children of Israel were an extremely patriarchal society, and this story illustrates that. Pretty much the sole duty of a wife was to give birth to boys, ideally, but children, definitely. With this story as part of their founding traditions, this would have been an important issue for a nomadic and tribal people whose very existence was for most of history at threat from neighbouring tribes and empires. It was important to have all the children they could, to continue the family line (which was vital), to replace those who died through normal infant mortality rates, as well as children and adults, killed and captured in times of war. So, the

spilling of Onan's semen while making love was considered evil. There is an excellent explanation of the story here:

<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/1239/what-was-onans-sin>

Onan's sin was really one of greed and ambition. If Onan and Tamar had a child, that child would inherit a larger share of Judah's wealth at his death, along with the clan leadership, because he would be considered the child of the older dead brother. No child, and Onan gets it all.

When men and women have sex, the intent was **always** to produce children, however, in masturbation and gay sex, there is no possibility of procreation and the semen/seed is "wasted". Because the "spilling of seed" was considered evil, it has been an easy extrapolation to say that both masturbation and homosexuality are also evil. I suspect it is this historic ignorance that lies behind a lot of our prejudice against homosexuality (and masturbation). Each successive generation has been taught by parents and peer groups that homosexuality (and masturbation) are evil – because spilling seed in any other place than the vagina was killing the potential for life. God had commanded humanity to *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.* (Gen 1: 28.)

Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, you could probably argue that the issue of "spilling of seed" was only really pertinent in relatively small communities and those vulnerable to wars and pandemics and so less relevant to the last 100/150 years, when populations have grown. Hence it was culturally relevant in the society of the time, where life was under much greater threat, and procreation vital to the nation's needs.

Homosexual orientation as a concept, as we understand it today, would, in that culture, be regarded as selfish, anti-social, and against God's general instructions to create offspring. Family heritage was key: the family line dies when people don't marry a person of the opposite gender and produce a male child. That would be a societal and cultural judgement, not a moral one. Those with a Homosexual orientation at the time would have married someone of the opposite sex, simply to carry the family forward, even if they had no feelings whatsoever for their spouse. From various odd literary and documentary sources, it's likely that what we define as gay men and women were able to have extra-marital relationships with others of the same gender, it's just that they did it, without threatening the family unit, because they all knew how important the unit was. For one thing the wife was considered property, with no real rights of her own.

Interestingly, although the wasting of semen was considered a bad thing, the passing of an egg from a body, was not, even though eggs are vastly more limited in supply. That's because until 1860 no-one knew about eggs and the fertilisation process, although William Harvey (1578–1657) described the doctrine of **omne vivum ex ovo** (all life comes from the egg). His studies of nature, however, were limited, because he was simply using a magnifying glass!

Today, not just in the West, we are in the position where population growth is something we must control, and we don't want hordes of children. We therefore don't see the spillage of semen as morally wrong. Indeed, we look for ways to:

- kill it (spermicides in condoms);
- prevent its transmission (vasectomy);
- prevent it from completing its purpose (the pill);
- terminate the newly fertilised egg (Morning After pill and abortion).

This isn't the place for discussing the theology of that pill or abortion, but simply recognising the use. There is still a degree of unease about being seen to endorse masturbation, but society in general, seems quite relaxed about accepting it as normal. From a Christian stance we have a bigger problem because we are taught by Jesus that we must not objectify the opposite sex, and masturbation really is an outlet that thrives on just that. So, the perfect Christian brings that under the Lordship of Christ, and the imperfect one asks for help and forgiveness. It's not the spillage of semen that is an issue, but the lustful objectification of someone you temporarily fancy.

The next (much shorter!) Biblical reference doesn't come for about 500 years but is one of the key passages often quoted against the gay community. The Israelites had escaped from Egypt and were being led by God to the Promised Land, via a circuitous route, because of their repeated disobedience. At that time, life was fragile, relying on God for food and water. Death was commonplace, with none of the adults (bar Caleb and Joshua) who left Egypt, entering the Promised Land. Many Israelites died in skirmishes with local tribes, as well as by snakebites and other judgements from God.

So, with that background and underpinning let's get stuck into the significant Old Testament passages:

Leviticus 18:19-22: - ¹⁹ *"Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.* ²⁰ *Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.* ²¹ *Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.* ²² ***Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.***"

AND

Leviticus 20:8-24: - The early verses are about holiness and not worshipping or offering children in a fiery sacrifice to Molek.

⁸ *Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.* ⁹ *"Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. Because they have cursed their father or mother, their blood will be on their own head.* ¹⁰ *"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.* ¹¹ *"If a man has sexual relations with his father's wife, he has*

dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹² "If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹³ **"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.** ¹⁴ "If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you. ¹⁵ "If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he is to be put to death, and you must kill the animal. ¹⁶ "If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹⁷ "If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They are to be publicly removed from their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible. ¹⁸ "If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them are to be cut off from their people. ¹⁹ "Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother or your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you would be held responsible. ²⁰ "If a man has sexual relations with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will be held responsible; they will die childless. ²¹ "If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless. ²² "Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. ²³ You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. ²⁴ But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

I'm taking these together as they are essentially the same, and looking at the verses on the page, in English, they give the biggest and clearest problem if you are arguing to treat gay folks in the same way as straight. Essentially, Leviticus 18 lists many of the same sins as Leviticus 20, but Leviticus 20 adds the punishment to be applied. A quick and cheap riposte would be to say that as Christians we are no longer under the Law, but under grace, so this no longer applies – case closed!

That is quite true, but you'll come back and say that we should seek to uphold the law with the Holy Spirit guiding us, so I'm going to treat it as if we are still under law. The problem here is that we must again take a verse out of context in Leviticus 18, where the author has been talking about holiness and forbidden forms of sexual behaviour – within the context of worship of Canaanite gods – notice that. Indeed, chapters 17 to 26 are regarded as being the Holiness Code showing how the Israelites would be identifiably different from the Canaanites and the earlier

Egyptians. Both cultures worshipped fertility gods and goddesses, but this wasn't to be the future for the chosen people.

It should be noted that neither passage refers to lesbianism, though most non-affirming evangelicals would add this by default. Let me say that again: the idea of men lying with men is superficially addressed here, but there is nothing here about women lying with women, and you must not add to Scripture what isn't there.

Bear in mind here that we are talking about a patriarchal society where women don't count for anything other than property. In every church sermon, we are continually told how important words are, we analyse them, pull them apart, look at other examples of where they are used, to get a fuller understanding of what the text means. Using that same *modus operandi*, it is therefore wholly wrong to add text to Scripture that simply isn't there, and this is what happens when the idea of lesbianism is inserted to passages like this, simply to bolster an argument. This all helps show how inconsistent and weak the argument is. How can you claim that what we understand as homosexuality is a sin, if lesbianism isn't mentioned? It's a good example of a clash of world views: contemporary 21st Century versus late Bronze-Age.

A very good place to start with this passage is the Blog post written by Alex Haiken (who holds a Master's degree from Westminster Theological Seminary and is, among other things, a lecturer, teacher, blogger and conference speaker), from which I quoted near the beginning of this document. He writes:

One never arrives at truth by asking of the Bible, "What does it mean?" The reason is that's the wrong starting point. You're really asking, what does it mean to us today, individually?" And that's why we end up with thousands of different answers. Exegesis always asks, "What DID it mean?" There's a vast difference in those questions as a starting points. Unless we have some idea of what the text meant THEN, we're left to only guess at what it might mean for us NOW.

Exegesis requires that if we wish to interpret the Bible responsibly, we must seek to draw out FROM the text what it originally meant to the author and to the original intended audience, without reading INTO it the many traditional interpretations that may have grown up around it. The reader today must somehow try to enter the world of the biblical writer and seek to understand what the writer was saying. In contrast to this, what far too many do instead is what some theologians refer to as "frontloading", that is to say, they read their own personal, political and prejudicial beliefs back into the Bible, instead of reading out from the Bible what the original writers were saying. This process of reading one's own ideas into interpretation of the Bible is called "eisegesis". Exegesis and eisegesis are conflicting approaches to interpreting the Bible. Exegesis is about reading out from the Bible what the original writers were saying. Eisegesis is about reading one's own ideas or prejudices back into the Bible. But exegesis does not

allow us to tear a passage from its context to replace it in another age for convenience.

<https://jewishchristiangay.wordpress.com/2011/10/18/leviticus-18-what-was-the-abomination/>

He goes on to talk about how Archaeology helps, the pervasiveness of Paganism and Idolatry through scripture and describes Fertility Cult Prostitution. He makes a lot of really helpful comments before applying them to the two passages and I strongly request that you read the whole of that article before moving on. It provides a really helpful insight and understanding, so please don't skip it before continuing. Indeed I would say the real answer to the meaning of these verses is clearly explained there.

In addition, make sure you read right down to the bottom including his responses to the 'feedback'. There is one particularly helpful paragraph in his feedback to the first comment:

Jesus also provided a very important hermeneutic tool to help his followers negotiate their way through moral debates about OT law. He identified one Levitical command as the key to understanding the rationale behind all the others. Quoting Lev 19:18, He said: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This suggests that when trying to determine why an OT law was given and what its relevance is to a modern Christian, two vital questions must be asked: (1) What HARM to neighbor was this command intended to PREVENT? And (2) what GOOD to neighbor was this command intended to PROMOTE? And though Lev 19:18 was not all that popular in the days of the OT, it is the verse from the Torah, or first five books of the Bible, that is the most frequently cited in the NT. It's a summary and a fulfilling of the Law that was repeatedly referred to by Jesus, Paul and James.

In the context of holiness and purity, read this excellent article written on the Christian Gay website: <https://resources.christiangays.com/04-pagans-purity-and-property-leviticus/>.

From that article, I would like to include this helpful extract:

"The laws in Leviticus are concerned with how to maintain purity, or more specifically how to avoid impurity. Impurity equates to being dirty and according to the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas "dirt is essentially disorder or matter out of place" (Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today, by William Countryman). Countryman illustrates the difference between purity (cleanliness) and impurity (uncleanness) through the example that "The coffee in a cup is clean, but the pair of [trousers] I spill the coffee on is dirty. The coffee in the cup and the coffee spilled on the [trousers] is the same coffee and yet when the coffee is where it's supposed to be it's clean and when it's out of place it's dirty." (Dirt, Greed and Sex, page 13).

Even as small children we learn that food spilled on your clothes is no longer food but has been somehow transformed into dirt, something that's unclean because it's out of place. When your shirt was covered with peanut butter you'd hear "Change your shirt Honey. It's dirty." So uncleanness is disorder, things out of place, things not as they're supposed to be or usually are.

Purity also means to be whole or complete. In antiquity there was an ideal for every species in creation. When a member of a species met the ideal it was considered pure or whole. The ideal for land animals was that they have cloven hoofs and this meant that while ox, sheep and goats were clean, pigs and camels were considered unclean. A blemish on an animal prevented it from being offered as a sacrifice because the blemish rendered the animal outside of the ideal since all members of that species didn't have a blemish. Equally, there was an ideal of what constituted cleanliness or uncleanness in humanity and a fascinating example of this is in Leviticus 13:12-13 that deals with leprosy. If a priest suffered from leprosy so that only portions of his skin were affected then he was unclean but if the leprosy covered all his body, he was pronounced clean. What sounds illogical to us makes sense with an ancient worldview where cleanliness was determined by wholeness. With all the skin turned the same color by the leprosy, the person with the leprosy was rendered whole but if there were only blotches there was incompleteness and so he was unclean."

(If you can read the full web page there is a lot of other very helpful background about the idea of being whole, or complete, that feeds into our understanding of this passage.)

This has a big impact on our understanding of the Levitical passages. Another excellent page dealing with Leviticus 18 is to be found here, so go and read it: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibh4.htm. It gives an explanation of the difficulties of Leviticus 18: 22. Essentially there are two views: one that states all homosexuality is wrong and the other that the passage is actually making the point that "Ritual anal sex between two men in a Pagan temple is forbidden." It then goes on to describe what type of sin this transgression falls under. There are two types: moral sin and ceremonial uncleanness. They go on to explain the two:

1. **"Moral sin** is produced by rebellion against God. This seems to be the interpretation of most biblical translations imply when they translate the Hebrew 'toeyvah' in this verse into English words such as 'abomination', 'enormous sin', or 'detestable'.
2. **Ceremonial uncleanness** is caused by contact with a forbidden object or by engaging in a behaviour which might be quite acceptable to non-Hebrews, but which was forbidden to the Children of Israel. Eating birds of prey, eating shellfish, cross breeding livestock, picking up sticks on a Saturday, planting a mixture of seeds

in a field, and wearing clothing that is a blend of two textiles are examples of acts of ritual impurity which made a Child of Israel unclean. These were not necessarily minor sins; some called for the ancient Israelite to be executed or expelled from the tribe."

A companion page (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/sinhebrs1.htm>) makes the case much more clearly where they ask:

"Is Leviticus 18: 22 a special case?"

Leviticus 18: 22 appears just before the anti-bestiality passage cited above. It, and a parallel verse in Leviticus 20: 13, are two of the most commonly used verses in the Bible to oppose homosexual behaviour. The King James Version of the Bible translates this as:

"Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination."

This has been interpreted in many ways. Some are:

- Forbidding anal intercourse between two men.*
- Prohibiting all sexual activities between two men.*
- Forbidding sex acts between either two men or two women, irrespective of the nature of their relationship.*
- Prohibiting sex between two men as part of a ritual in a Pagan temple.*
- Forbidding two men from having sex together if they do it in a woman's bed.*
- Forbidding two Hebrew men from performing anal intercourse; the law had no impact on Gentiles.*
- Forbidding anal sex because it could not result in a pregnancy. This prohibition is needed because a high birth rate was badly needed in a nation that was constantly being attacked by foreigners. This is [...] hardly applicable today when overpopulation of the world is a problem.*

Perhaps of even greater importance is that no consensus exists concerning of what type this forbidden behaviour was:

- Whether it is a moral sin. Some theologians, particularly from the conservative wing of Christianity and Judaism firmly take this position.*
- Whether it is a ritually impure act. Others, particularly religious liberals, consider this verse as part of the preceding Holiness Code. That is, it teaches that sex between two males makes both of them ritually impure because one partner is leaving "the class to which they belong." One man is being penetrated instead of doing the penetrating; they are adopting the role of a woman.*

One key to the proper interpretation may be the Hebrew word 'to'ebah,' translated as 'abomination' in the King James Version and

*“detestable” in the New International Version. Both English words seem to imply moral sin. **However, this word was translated in the Septuagint — the Bible used by Jesus’ disciples and the early Christians — into the Greek word ‘bdelygma’, which meant ritual impurity.** If the writer(s) of Leviticus wished to refer to a moral violation, he/they probably would have used the Hebrew word ‘zimah.’*

Another key to the puzzle is put forth by many religious conservatives. These two verses in Leviticus are merely two out of many Bible passages which mention homosexuality. They believe that the others clearly condemn homosexual acts as immoral sins. Thus, it would be more consistent to assume that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 also describe moral failings.

However, many religious liberals and secularists take the opposite position. They interpret the other six or so references to same-gender sexual behaviour as not being sins for persons with a homosexual or bisexual orientation. Thus they might conclude that Leviticus 18:22 would be consistent to the other biblical passages if it does not condemn such behaviour as a moral sin.

The difference between these alternatives is enormous.

- *If sex between two males is a moral sin, then a good case can be made that it is still immoral today, even if performed by a married same-sex couple.*
- *If it is merely an impure act, then it might have the status as other polluting activities, such as getting a tattoo, planting a grass seed mixture in one’s front lawn, wearing a cotton-polyester shirt, eating shellfish, munching on some barbequed pork ribs, or eating supper with a person who follows another religion. That is, Leviticus 18:22 may be an old prohibition that simply does not apply today.*

We can safely reach one conclusion: the Bible passage of Leviticus 18:22 is ambiguous. Sincere, thoughtful, intelligent theologians read the passage in the original Hebrew or in English translations, and reach very different conclusions about its meanings.”

In May 2021 my friend Don, drew my attention to an article published on the 5th May 2021 by Pink News: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/05/05/catholic-church-lgbt-gay-relationships-bible-wijnngaards-institute-study-mary-mcaleese/>

In that article they report the publication of an 80-page report compiled by the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, called “Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment”. The authors were “20 biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, evolutionary biologists and sociologists [who had] come together to disprove the foundations upon which the Catholic Church built its anti-LGBT+ stance.” Since the Catholic stance and the traditional evangelical

stance are the same, this document could prove very significant. The report says about these verses from Leviticus that:

The use of those two verses as proof-texts for a biblical condemnation of male homosexual behavior presupposes that their meaning is clear and unambiguous. Yet ***the underlying Hebrew has proven difficult to pin down univocally.*** A literal word-by-word translation is "And-with a male not you-will-lie 'lyings-of' a-woman". The interpretive key is the mysterious expression "lyings-of," or "lying-places-of", a Hebrew expression generally translated as "beds".

The uncertainty on the meaning of that verse is such that OT scholar Bruce Wells noted the recent opinion that said verse is "so unintelligible that [...] scholars should 'admit defeat' in light of the perplexities it presents and forgo further attempts to arrive at a sensible interpretation of these biblical texts".

Indeed, in both cases ***the translation used to support the traditional interpretation can only be reached by changing that original text considerably:*** it does so by adding the comparative particle "as", and "with", both words which are absent from the Hebrew, as well as by choosing to ignore the key expression "lyings-of". [Emphasis from original authors]

... An initial finding of [OT scholar Bruce] Wells's study is that the expression "lyings of a woman" functions as a qualifier, which limits the scope of the prohibition of the male-with-male relationship. Stewart among others had already noticed: "Did the writer need to write more than 'You shall not lie with a male' if the intent was a general condemnation of male homosexuality? Unless one posits that the 'lyings of a woman' means nothing, or is a redundancy, it must specify something."

Wells confirmed that observation by an examination of the structure of the surrounding Leviticus' prohibitions, almost all of which qualify the object of the prohibition. In the only two cases where they do not, they make explicit the universality of the prohibition by using words such as "any" or "all".

Significantly, at least six other experts of Leviticus all agree that the expression "lyings of a woman" functions as a qualifier, which signifies a specific category of males with whom same-sex sex is forbidden. In other words, it limits the scope of the prohibition to a specific male-with-male relationship. All six scholars also agree that the most accurate literal translation of that expression is "beds of a woman".

Consequently, all six scholars reached the same initial conclusion: *Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 are not concerned with (male) homosexuality in itself, but rather with some other illicit sexual activity designated by the*

expression “beds of a woman,” which signifies a specific category of males with whom same-sex sex is forbidden.

The specific category of people signified by such an expression has been difficult to pinpoint due to its rarity: in addition to the parallels Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, it only occurs once more in the entire bible, in Gen. 49:4.

For this reason, those six scholars have provided three slightly different hypotheses as to what the specific category of forbidden males actually is: *married men* (i.e. a prohibition of adultery), *male relatives* (i.e. a prohibition of incest), or *both*.

... Wells’ recent interpretation has been praised, sometimes with qualifications, by a number of Old Testament scholars with a specific expertise in Leviticus or sexual laws in the Hebrew bible. Significantly, it is currently the one which accounts well for the peculiarities of the original Hebrew (both in those Leviticus verses as well as in the two known parallels, in Gen. 49:4 and Qumran 1QSa).

In contrast, the traditional translation “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman” interpreted as forbidding male-male intercourse in general – does not account fully for the original Hebrew. It is no longer tenable.

Extracts taken from pp43-47 “Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment”. There are many citations in this article which I haven’t included, but the full details are shown on each page of the report.

I like the final sentence of the extract: “It is no longer tenable.”

Finally, I want to bring the Apostle Paul into the debate around Leviticus 18 and indeed the whole Law. Let’s look at Galatians 3: 10-14:

¹⁰ For **all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse**, as it is written: “**Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.**” ¹¹ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

In verse 10 Paul is using Leviticus 18 (⁵ *Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.*) and turning it through 180 degrees. Basically, the implication of the Leviticus passage is that things will go well for you if you obey the Law, so if you don’t obey the law, things won’t go well,

and Paul is picking up on this. Throughout Galatians he is arguing that you put a smile on the face of God if you have faith in him, however small that is. However, Paul very stridently asserts here that *“all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse”* so if your argument against the LGBT+ community is based on the Old Testament Law (Any passage from Genesis through Deuteronomy) you are in grave peril. Note the significance that Paul is quoting from another verse of the very passage being used against the community.

So, what are my conclusions from these pages about these Levitical commands?

Leviticus cannot now be used as a stick to beat people with, because the meaning of these verses from Leviticus are unknown and rather messy. The document *“Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment”* provides a very helpful, very thorough, and very clear narrative that we can lean on.

Regardless of that, what seems fascinating is that almost all non-affirming evangelicals do not seek the death penalty for gays, despite the apparent wording of Leviticus 20: 13. So, they would say the latter part of this verse no longer applies, even though in their minds, the former does! Strange how people can rationalize their condemnation but have no stomach for the penalty of the supposed transgression!

What happened? Why are non-affirming Christians against the death-penalty for this – using their own logic, their stance is unbiblical. How can one Law be set-aside and not another?

Without that helpful report, I’d want to say that since all commandments are there to stop people harming themselves, others, and their relationship to God, I’d want to ask what harm, this command was intended to prevent, and whether it still apply today? You might want to hold on to the non-affirming view, but there is now far greater weight that says the passage isn’t talking about what we know of male-to-male consensual sex in a permanent relationship.

Nevertheless, I would also argue that even if you were utterly convinced that the Levitical Laws regarding Homosexuality should still apply, I would make the point that because of the harm they do, and that they conflict with so much of the spirit of the Beatitudes, Jesus would set them aside, dismissing them, just as we have seen Paul does.

Just before we leave this chapter, I just want to address another issue here, and that is the term *‘to’ebah’*, which is frequently translated as *‘abomination’*, though the NIV uses the word *‘detestable’*. This is the word *“Detestable”* at the end of Leviticus 18: 22 and Leviticus 20:13. This term *“detestable”* is translated as *‘abomination’* in many versions of the Bible and is frequently hurled at those who are gay. In Scripture, as we have already seen, the use of this word is more often used to describe something being ritually improper. Eating a lobster, crab, prawn, or shrimp is *‘to’ebah’*, and most of us have eaten at least one of those! Eating rabbit or pork is also *‘to’ebah’*, or an *‘abomination’* if you use that type of language. In addition, you’ll be horrified to realise that eating a cheeseburger is

against the Purity Laws as well (mixing milk and meat – and some of our normal recipes do just that! When did you last have lasagne, or a ham and cheese sandwich – or a pizza with melted cheese over the pepperoni, or spiced meats?). Crossbreeding animals is an abomination according to the law. So, all those Labradoodles and other cross-bred dogs that breeders love so much, are an abomination! Farmers crossbreed cows to bring the good traits of one breed into another, so that a hardier breed can produce more meat, and can therefore be viably farmed in more rugged areas. The same is true within sheep farming. All these are abominations according to Scripture - oh but we don't count **these** do we, instead, we just want to target a small group of people to make us feel more elite and superior. Such inconsistency! By the way, the penalty for those of you who have eaten haggis or black pudding, is, according to Leviticus 17: 10 and 14, that God will set His face against you and you will be killed, because they contain blood – the life of the animal. So, if you want to live by the Law, at least be consistent, though I'd prefer you to be as flexible as Jesus was.

Thus, even if you take the non-affirming standpoint, the worst-case scenario is that all the passage is saying is that you are ritually unclean, under the old Law, which is redundant today, because of God's gift of Grace. Don't forget what we said at the beginning of this section about the Levitical passages explaining how uncleanness was more an issue of incompleteness, not being whole – a lack of perfection. I know of no Christian who views themselves as sinners purely for eating prawns or rabbit, much less praying for forgiveness at the end of the course of food, because we have eaten an abomination. Maybe you should be asking God for forgiveness when leaving McDonald's!) I know I, and probably most of us already feel we are not perfect – there are many things wrong, or not quite right with us, so being gay, might be just one more if my argument is wrong, and I have completely misunderstood Scripture.

To adjust the illustration used earlier, the principal of incompleteness/lack of perfection, can be illustrated like this: Let's use the example of a fine meal. Once you have finished eating the food on the plates, you take the plates out for washing, because they are 'dirty', even though you could still use a fork and pick up that extra scrap of food you left and eat it! Nothing has changed, other than in our minds. The food scraps haven't been contaminated but the plates have changed their function in our minds: they have fulfilled their role of containing our food, and now need to be stored away, and as such are now regarded as dirty and need cleaning. This is because the food that was in the right place on the plate, is now in the wrong place on the plate! In fact, it must come off the plate completely.

Uncleanness is largely irrelevant to the Christian who, by faith, has been forgiven, and is no longer answerable to the law, as much of Romans explains. So how can you make a case that being gay is different? Please be consistent in your thinking.

Other Old Testament “Clobber” passages + Background for the New Testament passages

There are some other passages which occasionally get referred to, but rather than do an analysis on each, I will point you to a web page which does a pretty good job of talking through the issues giving both sides of the debate. The link is:

http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibh1.htm, and the passages dealt with

are: **Deuteronomy 23:17; Judges 19:14-29 (also through to ch 21.); I Kings 14:24, 15:12 and 22:46; & II Kings 23:7.** In essence all these passages are disputed, and the argument turns on whether you translate the Hebrew word “Qadesh” as a temple prostitute or a Sodomite. In the context, it is far more likely to be the former, especially as it would be more consistent with the character of God, given his anger directed at idolatry, and a consistency of His ethics.

The Judges 19 passage is pretty disturbing, and warrants some examination here. It is hugely reminiscent of the angels visiting Lot in Sodom, with striking parallels. This time however it is a Hebrew town rather than a Canaanite one, and as already inferred, the story is deeply unpleasant, and like Sodom, the attackers seem to be heterosexual men seeking to humiliate the visitor.

Do read the analysis of the passage on that website, but as it is a hugely significant passage, I want to add my own narrative. Although the above site looks at Judges 19: 14-29, it is well worth reading Judges chapters 19-21 as a complete block. This gives the context, the story, and the tragic fallout of the actions.

This is the story of how a Levite took a sex slave (concubine). However, after a while she leaves him to return to her family. Sometime later, the Levite goes to her family in Bethlehem to get her back. Her father wines and dines the Levite persuading him to stay day after day. By the fifth day the Levite insists on leaving with his concubine and his servant. However, they don't have time to get home before dark, so they head for a town called Gibeah, in Benjamin, where they head for the town square. This is where custom dictates that someone from the town will come and offer hospitality. They hang around for a long time, but nobody offers any room for the night. Finally, an elderly man returns from the field and offers hospitality, honouring the customary obligations to visitors, which is accepted.

After the travellers have eaten and had something to drink, some “wicked” men from the town gather outside, pounding on the door demanding that the visitor (I assume the servant wasn't included, given the content of the text) come outside so they could have sex with him. (Later, in Ch 20: 5, when describing what happened, he says they were going to kill him, which is entirely possible.) The elderly host refuses, and instead offers his own virgin daughter, and the Levite's concubine. The men refuse, and the host pushes the concubine out to them anyway. They use and abuse her till dawn, at which point she crawls back to the house and dies on the doorstep. The Levite, not realising she's dead seems to step over her and tells

her to get up because they're leaving. When he realises she's dead, he, presumably with the help of the servant, puts her body on the donkey and returns home. On arriving, he cuts up her body into twelve parts and sends a part to every area of Israel, which causes a bit of a stir!

I just need to introduce a brief word of historical explanation: Although the "Children of Israel" were made up of twelve tribes, they functioned as one nation, Israel, until the beginning of Rehoboam's reign, shortly after Solomon died. Then, the 10 Northern tribes split away, under one king, Jeroboam, but continued to be known as Israel. The two southern tribes were Judah (with Jerusalem as the capital) and Benjamin, and they had one king, Rehoboam, and were collectively called Judah.

Later, because of their continual sin, both Israel and Judah are exiled, Israel to the Assyrians, and Judah (about 100 years later) to Babylon. The Israelites disappear from history, and the remnant of Judah (the Jews) return from exile about fifty years after the last captive was taken to Babylon.

The story we have just read is set towards the latter period of the Judges, so prior to the first king. This was when all twelve tribes in the Kingdom were united, and it was effectively a Civil War. However, some scholarly research says the incident occurred **after** the exile and a Scribe felt it read better if inserted at the end of the Book of Judges, but that's a can of worms I'm not going to be side-tracked by!

The nation unsurprisingly demands to know why they were sent dismembered parts of a woman. The fighting that followed resulted with the deaths of forty thousand Israelites and twenty-five thousand Benjamites (and who knows how many women and children), over a complicated three days of fighting. When the Israelites win, they also set fire to many towns of Benjamin. There was great sorrow over the number of lives lost, and the loss of one of the tribes of Israel. They realised they needed to find a way to restore Benjamin, which wasn't helped because Israel had sworn an oath to never allow their daughters to marry a Benjamite following the atrocity with the concubine. This was resolved in another convoluted and bloody fashion, which you can read about in chapter 21.

The main body of the story is remarkably similar to that of the angels visit to Sodom, and it is important to notice that neither Lot in the case of Sodom, or the Levite (here in Judges 19) make any comment about the issue being one of same-sex attraction, but it seems to wholly be a question of humiliating and dominating a visitor, which results in the infringement of hospitality regulations. What seems tragic, and potentially more evil, is how the Benjamites defend those who perpetrated the original crime, refusing to listen to the accusations (Judges 20), resulting in the battles that end with the death of so many people. We aren't told about the wounded.

We covered the story of Sodom in some detail, and the details are so similar, you can probably go back to the Sodom story, and, with this one fresh in your mind, see how it can't be an issue of homosexuality, but of humiliation and domination.

The setup for the story is identical to the Sodom and Gomorrah story:

- Visitors come into town looking for somewhere to stay for the night.
- One of the residents offers hospitality.
- The resident in each case is not a native of the town (Lot from all over the place, and interestingly, the old man “from the hill country of Ephraim”, but now living in Benjamin.)
- Other residents spot the visitors and are suspicious.
- They pound on the door demanding to have sex with the visitors as an act of domination and humiliation.

Now, to make a complete change of direction, I need to deal with one more issue that I haven't found referred to elsewhere and that is regarding a discussion Jesus had about marriage, and whether it was acceptable to divorce on any, and every, reason. In Matthew 19: 3-8 the text reads: -

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” ⁴ “Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ 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’? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” ⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” ⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

Generally, the words and commands written in the Torah (the Mosaic books – Genesis-Deuteronomy) are attributed to God. Here the Pharisees (the ultra-upholders of the law of Moses!) ask why **Moses** gave the command. Rather than Jesus replying “No, no, you've got it wrong, it was God who said that through Moses” He agrees and reinforces their comments that this was a command of Moses but not of God. If Moses could give rules that God would honour, are there others who have the same authority? Do **we** have any authority under the New Covenant, under the power of the Holy Spirit? Maybe the answer to that is no, but it's good to ask questions! Moses gave a lot of commands, so how many of these Levitical commands come from Moses and how many from God? Yes, this may be opening a can of worms, but currently those commands are being used to beat up on an admittedly small, but certainly not insignificant group of people.

While we talk about Jesus' attitudes to the Mosaic Law, it is interesting to note how Jesus sometimes dismisses the Law. Look at Exodus 21:

²³ But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 5 but says:

*³⁸ “**You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’** ³⁹ **But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you***

on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

We are frequently told by preachers that what Jesus often did was to take the Law and make it tougher, so that the Law says you can't commit adultery, but Jesus says you can't even look at a woman without it being a sin. However, here we have a Law that allows the victim a limited amount of retribution (at the time this was much more measured and restrained than in surrounding cultures), but Jesus is looking at it from the angle of Grace and Mercy. How much good is there in two people being killed, blinded, etc? So, Jesus is saying that where the Law brings the community/the Kingdom of God, overall harm, it can be set aside. He is not going soft on Justice, but He is looking into the heart. Jesus doesn't say to drop the legal process of convicting the person of their crime, but He does want to remove the element of revenge from proceedings and replace it with mercy and grace.

I would therefore say that Jesus would be horrified and angered that a group of people, who didn't choose to be where they are, would have the Law of God used against them, particularly by Christians who are saying, "you are rejected by God". These are the very people who teach about God's forgiveness and Grace. I would suggest that the way Jesus quotes from, and uses, the Old Testament, not just here but in other places, gives every justification to set aside the Levitical Law (especially the verses purportedly about homosexuals), if it ever really applied to gay men! You already know I believe it to be about Canaanite fertility rituals, and idol worship, not gay men.

In his book "God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships", Matthew Vines quotes John Piper, saying:

As John Piper has written of Mark 10: 5, the equivalent of Matthew 19: 8, this passage indicates "that there are laws in the Old Testament that are not expressions of God's will for all time, but expressions of how best to manage sin in a particular people at a particular time."

I know it's academic in many ways because we are no longer under Law but under Grace, which we will address properly later. Nevertheless, the non-affirming part of the church may be banging a drum that has nothing much to support it.

So, that's an overview of the Old Testament passages. We could have taken the simplistic, but quite correct view that they no longer apply because Jesus has done away with the Law, but as the Old Testament provides context for the New Testament and explains good and bad behaviours, it was quite right to look at them closely. Besides, Jesus' Bible was the Old Testament, and He said He came to fulfil and uphold the Law:

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be

*called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5: 17-19*

Having made that remark about Jesus saying the Law is here to stay, and He isn't here to abolish it, I need to point out that Jesus wasn't saying the Law is fixed and inflexible. He doesn't see the Law/the Bible as a strict rulebook. In His teaching in the "Sermon on the Mount" he frequently commented: "You have heard that it was said ... But I tell you that...". As we said just now, Jesus sometimes made the Law harder to obey and sometimes set it aside completely, such as when his disciples picked grain and broke open the heads in their hands, to eat the seeds, to the consternation of the Pharisees. You can also look at Jesus' various healings on the Sabbath, which would have been regarded as work, especially for a healer. Then you have Jesus' comments that what you ate did not defile you, but it was what came out of you that defiled you – this ran completely counter to the Law which prohibited the eating of certain food, as we talk about elsewhere in this essay. Or where He defended the woman caught in adultery – the Law required her death, but Jesus showed mercy. In each case the Torah says "No", but Jesus says "Yes!" Yet Jesus still strongly advocates following the Law, but His caveat seems to be that you need to have an ear open to God, and an heart open to those around you – and be prepared to set aside the Law if the situation requires. Earlier I mentioned the theologian, Peter Enns. In his book "The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable To Read It" [Kindle p182/3], he comments on this part of Jesus' teaching saying:

Jesus's views on Torah were not entirely unique to him. He was not the first Jew, for example, to make divorce more difficult or to say that eye-for-an-eye retaliation should not be applied literally. Again, for Jesus to offer his views on Torah— to clarify or even take it to another level— isn't at all remarkable in his day.

For us, however, I simply want to point out that "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you . . ." is hard to square with a rulebook view of the Bible.

For Jesus, interpreting and respecting Torah meant— when necessary— not following the script, but being creative and adapting the past to speak to changing circumstances in the present. And in some cases, like divorce and oaths, Jesus finds Moses's words to be inadequate and in need of correction.

Speaking of finding parts of Torah inadequate, one more example comes right after the Sermon on the Mount. A potential follower of Jesus wants to bury his father before joining up. Jesus responds, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Jesus wasn't trying to be cute or cryptic. "Honor your mother and father" is the fifth commandment. Failure to bury one's father was a major dishonor, not only because it's just plain idiotic not to bury a

dead parent, but Jewish purity laws didn't look kindly upon leaving dead bodies lying around.

Whether or not Jesus was literally telling this guy to not bother burying his father, the larger point is clear: following Jesus is a burning matter and takes priority over the Torah command to honor one's parents.

Again, Jesus isn't throwing Torah in the dumpster, but the urgency of the in-breaking kingdom of heaven takes priority. "Family," as Jesus explains later, is not defined by blood but "whoever does the will of my father."

Jesus respected, even revered, his scripture as any Jew would have in his day. On the other hand, Jesus thinks that what he has to say about what it means to be right with God isn't just laid out in black and white in scripture to be followed to the letter.

Jesus adapts scripture creatively and at times even leaves some of it behind.

To be clear, what we are saying is the Gospel, the life Jesus brings, doing the will of the Father, is far more important than the Laws of Moses. I guess we've reached the point where some, who can see where this is leading, will have apoplexies, spluttering: "But, but..., you're twisting Scripture!" Am I? Really? Are you sure?

Before we talk about the New Testament passages it would be appropriate to write something about the culture that was in operation at the time that Paul was writing. "Oh no," I can sense folk saying, "he's about to rationalise it all because of the culture!" What I'm doing is looking at Scripture, but we MUST understand the culture of the day, in the same way as if we were looking at Jesus' treatment of women, for example, or any other theological issue, for that matter.

It's important to understand that in the first century, same-sex relationships were not thought to be expressions of sexual orientations but rather products of excessive sexual desire wherein people engaging in same-sex behavior did so out of an excess of lust that could not be satisfied.²³ The most common forms of same-sex behavior in the Greco - Roman world were pederasty and sex between masters and their slaves, and the majority of men who indulged in those practices also engaged in heterosexual behavior with their wives. (In other words, they weren't, as we understand it today, gay.) In Paul's world, if a man took the active role in a sexual encounter, his behavior was deemed "natural", but if he took the passive role, his behavior was considered "unnatural", for he had taken the presumed position of a woman, deemed in that culture to be his inferior. The opposite was

²³ For an in-depth look at what the Bible says about gender and sexuality, see James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); and Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent, 2015).

true for women: sexual passivity was deemed “natural”, while dominance was “unnatural”. These ideas were rooted in the honor-shame cultures of the Mediterranean and heavily influenced by patriarchal assumptions. Now, lest you think this only applies to same-sex relationships, consider this: Paul uses the **very same language** in a letter to the Corinthian church to argue that women should wear head coverings and men shouldn’t have long hair. “Judge for yourselves,” he wrote, “Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very **nature** of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a **disgrace** to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” (1 Corinthians 11: 13 – 15, emphasis mine [RHE]). He goes on to decry short-haired women and men with covered heads as similarly “unnatural”, appealing to everything from the created order to male authority to the opinions of angels. “If anyone wants to be contentious about this”, he concluded, “we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God” (11: 16). And yet many of the same Christians who condemn all same-sex behavior as “unnatural” according to the Bible, don’t apply the same standards to head coverings or hair lengths among the men and women in their own congregations. Most understand Paul’s language to the Corinthians to describe cultural customs, based on ancient views of gender roles, not universal truths. So once again we are left with some questions: Must we adopt first-century, Mediterranean cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality in order to embrace the gospel Paul was preaching there? Must we condemn all short-haired women, long-haired men, and gay and lesbian couples as “unnatural”? Do we apply the same rightful condemnation of pederasty and rape in ancient Rome to loving, committed same-sex relationships today?

Rachel Held Evans. “Inspired”. Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition. Page 204 Location 3421

‘The single most important concept that defines sexuality in the ancient Mediterranean world, whether we are talking about the kingdoms of Egypt or of Assyria or whether we are talking about the later kingdoms of Greece and Rome, is that approved sexual acts never occurred between social equals. Sexuality, by definition, in ancient Mediterranean societies required the combination of dominance and submission. This crucial social and political root metaphor of dominance and submission as the definition of sexuality rested upon a physical basis that assumed every sex act required a penetrator and someone who was penetrated. Needless to say, this definition of sexuality was entirely male—not surprising in the heavily patriarchal societies of the Mediterranean.’

Mary Tolbert (2002). “Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: Biblical Texts in Historical Contexts.” Paper delivered at Lancaster School of

Theology, originally published on the web at www.clgs.org, but as I can't locate the document, the above paragraph is quoted again in a number of places, but start here:
<https://www.mcccchurch.org/files/2016/08/BibleandHomosexuality.pdf>

With regard to Lesbianism, the Oxford Classical Dictionary has a scholarly article written by Sandra Boehringer, who writes:

Sexual and amorous relationships between females constitute, as a heuristic category, an illuminating field of research for the construction of sexual categories in antiquity, as well as for the prevailing gender system of the time. In Greece and Rome, sexuality did not have the identity function that we attribute to it today: in these societies "before sexuality," the category of female homosexuality, like those of heterosexuality or homosexuality in general, did not exist per se. Yet we have access to over forty documents (containing both substantial treatments and brief mentions), along with the terms hetairistria and tribas, associated with this semantic field.

In Archaic Greece, the privileged expression of erotic desire between women can be found without ambiguity in the verses of Alcman and Sappho. In this community context, the force of eros is celebrated, and the joys and pains generated by its power are sung without differentiation based on gender categories. In Classical and Hellenistic Greece, the sources become rarer: female homosexuality disappears from our evidence for the possible configurations of eros, with the notable exception of Plato's account (Symposium, Laws). Throughout the 3rd and 2nd centuries bce, it is in the context of playful and humorous discourses that authors (Amphis, Asclepiades) allude to relationships between women. The tone changes in the Roman world, where three types of discourse develop: that of elegiac poetry (particularly Ovid) which re-employs positive Greek motifs but shows the impossibility of such relationships; that of satire (e.g. Martial, Juvenal), particularly derogatory, where the complex figure of the tribas appears alongside ridiculous and repugnant characters; and, later, that of the classifying discourses of physiognomic or astrological texts. In Greece as in Rome, the rarity of these erotic representations in images and paintings indicates that sex between women barely entered, if at all, into the erotic imaginary of the masculine elite.

In antiquity, there is no perceived equivalence between male homoerotic love and female homoerotic love, just as the image of the tribas is not identical or strictly parallel to the figure of the Greek kinaidos or the Roman mollis. While the latter two may in certain circumstances embody a deviant masculinity that defines, through opposition, the masculine ideal, the tribas does not occupy any similar position in contrast to a figure embodying positive and privileged

femininity: in this respect, the ancient gender system is not symmetrical.

<https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.01.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8017>

You may have struggled with the language, but it is important to understand that the evidence for lesbianism is there, and yet the Bible doesn't address it, only really addressing homosexuality – and that, only if you take a narrow, blinkered approach, rather than looking at the evidence.

An easier article to understand is this piece called “Homosexuality in ancient Greece” on Wikipedia. Just to contextualize it, Biblically we are looking at the period of Nehemiah after the exiles have returned to Judah, and elsewhere the Roman republic is still relatively young:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_in_ancient_Greece.

In classical antiquity, writers such as Herodotus, Plato, Xenophon, Athenaeus and many others explored aspects of same-sex love in ancient Greece. The most widespread and socially significant form of same-sex sexual relations in ancient Greece was between adult men and pubescent or adolescent boys, known as pederasty (marriages in Ancient Greece between men and women were also age structured, with men in their thirties commonly taking wives in their early teens). Though homosexual relationships between adult men did exist, at least one member of each of these relationships flouted social conventions by assuming a passive sexual role. It is unclear how such relations between women were regarded in the general society, but examples do exist as far back as the time of Sappho.

The ancient Greeks did not conceive of sexual orientation as a social identifier as modern Western societies have done. Greek society did not distinguish sexual desire or behaviour by the gender of the participants, but rather by the role that each participant played in the sex act, that of active penetrator or passive penetrated. This active/passive polarization corresponded with dominant and submissive social roles: the active (penetrative) role was associated with masculinity, higher social status, and adulthood, while the passive role was associated with femininity, lower social status, and youth.

Pederasty

The most common form of same-sex relationships between males in Greece was ‘paiderastia’ meaning ‘boy love’. It was a relationship between an older male and an adolescent youth. A boy was considered a ‘boy’ until he was able to grow a full beard. In Athens the older man was called erastes, he was to educate, protect, love, and provide a role model for his eromenos, whose reward for him lay in his beauty, youth, and promise.

The roots of Greek pederasty lie in the tribal past of Greece, before the rise of the city-state as a unit of political organization. These tribal communities were organized according to age groups. When it came time for a boy to embrace the age group of the adult and to 'become a man', he would leave the tribe in the company of an older man for a period of time that constituted a rite of passage. This older man would educate the youth in the ways of Greek life and the responsibilities of adulthood.

It goes on to describe how the practices developed as cities flourished and the idea of leaving the community in a rite of passage no longer occurred. Pederasty as we have come to understand it developed, but penetrative sex was regarded as demeaning for the passive partner, and not accepted as the social norm.

If you are interested, the full article includes a lot more information you might be interested in reading. There is another helpful page on Wikipedia about Greek Love: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_love. This is helpful because it talks about the Roman side of things as well and gives a brief history of this type of sexuality through the years, as Western Culture and the church started to regard this as a taboo. There is a huge amount of information out there if you want to follow this up in greater detail.

In July 2016, a documentary programme called 'Who were the Greeks?' by Dr Michael Scott was broadcast on BBC4. This explained that in ancient Greece, sexual orientations were not set for life, so there were different sexual relationships that were appropriate at different stages of life, so pederasty was accepted as perfectly normal for teenage years, and then they would later marry and settle down within what we would describe as marriage with a woman. Occasionally the pederastic relationship would not end, but this was regarded as improper. In this context, the programme went on to indicate that in Athens, it was recognised that once married, a man should have sex 3 times a month with his wife, but if not with her, you could use a prostitute, and failing that, a live-in mistress. All these were socially acceptable, even if today we would find it somewhat bizarre.

In addition, in early 2017, the History Channel ran a programme called 'Roman Vice', in which they described the sexual attitudes and background of Rome. The culture of Rome was around for about one thousand years, so we should take notice of it, especially as it was the prevailing culture of the time of Jesus, Paul and the early church. In the programme, Dr Joy Connelly of New York University said that: "The key to Roman sexual morals is that the Roman male head of household, could do whatever he liked, whenever he liked, with whomever he liked. It could be boys; it could be women; it could be slaves". The narrator, Michael Brandon, then went on to say, "The crucial distinction is not between gender, or age, but who was the active and who was the passive participant. ... To most Roman men, sex is simply a pleasure to be seized and enjoyed". Earlier he had said that "Rome was a patriarchal society where the attitudes of men count, and the views of women don't".

Dr John Clarke from the University of Texas, commented that from a Roman perspective: "To have great sex was a blessing, not a kind of thing you did *guiltily*, not anything associated with sin. In fact, sexual sin as a concept doesn't come in at all in the Roman mentality. The elite man could have, and usually did buy, very beautiful male and female slaves, to use sexually." Michael Brandon then added, "The beauty of the love interest is of more importance than his or her gender".

Dr Joy Connelly later added:

*"One could be a **virtuous** Roman and have sex with all the slaves in one's house. ... One could be a virtuous Roman, and oppress and dominate others, in a way that I think is difficult for us to imagine - in the modern world. It may seem to us that these excesses represent Roman vice, but to Roman eyes these were **consistent with Roman virtue**".*

In addition:

Take a typical, happily married man, who is a master of his household (happily married from his point of view).

This man could, and often would, besides having intercourse with his wife, also rape his male and female slaves, rape boys, and sleep with prostitutes, and neither his masculinity nor his sexuality, nor his honour, would be in question at all.

In ancient Rome, sexuality wasn't defined by which gender you had sex with, or who you were attracted to, but whether you were the dominant, active, penetrating partner, or the submissive, passive one.

So long as a freeborn man was the dominant partner, little else mattered so long as you weren't sleeping with someone else's wife or daughter – slaves and prostitutes didn't count.

<http://www.bibleandhomosexuality.org/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality/> Rev'd Dr Jonathan Tallon. New Testament lecturer and early Church researcher.

Paul was writing to Christians, some of whom were Roman families with slaves and some of whom were slaves, being raped according to our cultural understanding. You can't use the apologetic that the Romans, "in their hearts, knew it was wrong." No, they simply would look at you blankly, wondering what you were talking about because it was what they had always known – it was part of their culture. It is therefore in this context we should understand Paul's writings. He wasn't writing to people in the early part of the 21st Century, or even to people with our cultural morality – he was writing to people in a very different culture, and to deny that, would be to treat scripture with disrespect and would therefore be very wrong. Our role is to figure out what Paul's audience thought he was thinking and saying, when he wrote it. If you say, "how can we possibly know that?" then your theological "jaiket's hangin' oan a shoogly peg" as we say in Scotland!

From my research it seems that in the ancient Greece of 500BC, there was no stigma attached to male or female homosexuality. Unlike our culture, the Greek culture simply didn't see it as particularly relevant. There wasn't a turning of a blind eye - it was simply unimportant. It was a shrug of the shoulders with the question, "Why do you ask? Do you have problem with this?" Men and women led very separate and different lives, they didn't go out together as a family, but as individuals, so the idea of relationship within that context is rather alien. Whereas men were seen debating in public (as we know from Paul's writings), women were largely confined to the home, and were there to produce, and raise, male children of the purest Athenian stock. Women were seen as property and were shut away to prevent adultery. The result was that many women simply had no real education, and therefore had nothing with which to engage her husband on an equal footing, so her role was to produce good Greek citizens of the future. Meanwhile, the impression I get from various writings is that Greek men tended to be a lot more bi-sexual in their activity, because all their dealings: business, trade, debate, entertainment was in the company of other men, and if they had sex with other men, it was not seen as a threat to the marriage, because they had a wife at home bringing up their children. Sex for pleasure could only be enjoyed with another man, not with a woman. The later Romanic culture largely borrowed these standards, although eventually, shortly before the time of Jesus, women within higher families started to get a bit more standing – indeed some social groupings were beginning to be made up of both men and women, but it was a very male-centric society, led by the religious authorities - totally alien to the radical teachings of Jesus.

There is a very well written, intelligent and gracious article giving a historical background to Sexual Orientation starting with the ancient world and progressing through to the current day on the canyonwalkerconnections.com website. The website is set up by Kathy Baldock the author of "Walking the Bridgeless Canyon - Repairing the Breach between the Church and the LGBTQ+ Community". Kathy is described as a straight conservative Evangelical Christian and is an acknowledged expert because of the detailed thoroughness of her research. The article is well worth a read and includes some background to the issue of pederasty and homosexuality in general. Indeed, one comment I found very interesting: "*Men who took the submissive role, the penetrated position in sex between males, had always been perceived as 'being' female.*" That is not a comment designed to be insulting, but one that recognises things as they are. Allow that to sink in and then read some of these difficult Biblical passages again. Read: <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/sexual-orientation-is-a-20th-century-understanding-of-human-sexuality/> and then spend an hour or so reading some of the other interesting blogs on the site. This is probably the site I would have liked to have stumbled across early in my search for answers to my questions about a Christian view of homosexuality, but then I might not have needed to write this.

– Chapter 11 –

The “Clobber” passages – New Testament Passages

With that background in place, we can now turn and look at the New Testament passages, which we can't simply sweep away, but will need to explore properly. What we have just read is the background to the culture of the Romans and Corinthians, and to several other towns Paul wrote letters to. As we turn our attention to what Paul says, it might be pertinent to ask what Jesus specifically said about the lesbian and gay folks of his day. Jesus says: “.....”. That's right, absolutely nothing! Given the massive issue this has become today, this must be a surprise – and that lack of comment must be significant. We cannot say that Jesus knew nothing of these relationships – his country was occupied by the Romans after all! I also want to point out that we might like to think he had had a sheltered upbringing, but that looks unlikely. When you think of someone who has had a sheltered upbringing there's almost a sense that people tend to have a little snigger about them behind their back, because of their naivety. Jesus on the other hand is totally respected from the get-go. People may not agree with him, but he is respected and even called 'Rabbi' by learned men, like Nicodemus (John 3), though Jesus had no formal training. Hence, I would be amazed if he never came across people who today would be regarded as gay or lesbian. Indeed, the words chosen and used by the writer Matthew in chapter 8: 5-13 when Jesus meets a Centurion who asks for his servant to be healed, are intriguing and interesting. Matthew uses the word 'pais' which is odd:

“If the boy had been the centurion's son, then the author probably would have used the Greek word “uios” (son). If the writer wanted to imply that they [sic] boy was a slave or indentured servant, then he probably would have used the word “duolos” (slave). But he did not. He used the Greek word pais which, in this situation, contains the suggestion of a young male kept for sexual purposes by his adult owner. The English word “pederasty” comes partly from this word. Various translations of the Christian Scriptures have suppressed the possible sexual component of the term and translated the word simply as a “servant boy”, “serving boy”, “young servant,” “my son,” and “my boy.” A present-day relationship of this type would be considered child sexual abuse, a serious crime. However, such arrangements were common in the Roman Empire at the time, and were tolerated by society, as was human slavery itself.

The Gospel of Luke, starting at Luke 7:2 told the same story differently. The boy was changed into a slave of undefined age who was 'dear to' (KJV) the Centurion. The author used the Greek word doulos which is a generic term for servant or slave. He was described as being very sick and near death; this contrasts with the author of Matthew who description of a boy being paralyzed and in great pain.” Quoted from: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc2.htm.

To be clear and upfront, the Centurion might have been using his slave for sex, but he might not, but it is intriguing! I have come across this example in other places, and it is fascinating. Because I am minded to be cautious, I'm not sure I'd want to hang my theology on it – from either standpoint. Part of my hesitation is because the Centurion could have expected/demanded sex with the boy, and then a prostitute, and then with his wife and all would have been perfectly acceptable and normal in that culture – it wouldn't have made him gay. Also, I'm not sure we want to hang too much weight on that as being an acceptable relationship – that of slave and master. You may remember that a few pages ago we came across that same word 'pais' under the section entitled **Ancient Greek background** – go back and check. However, I do want you to go and compare both those Matthew and Luke passages. The literalist will have a problem, because in the Matthew version the Centurion comes personally, but in the Luke version he sends Jewish leaders in his place, so which Gospel is telling the story accurately, and which can't be relied on (tongue in cheek!).

By the way, let's make it clear that what we regard as homosexual acts were far more commonplace in the past (prior to 1850/60), than we think, but they were practised by what we would define as heterosexuals. Same sex relationships would have always been between a man and a male (and usually a boy). "So, if we see same-sex behaviour ... it would be a man with a boy, or a man with someone in lesser power. So, there would be always an age or power differential, and it would be based on lust, excess, violence or rape." (from Kathy Baldock - Canyonwalker Connections on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziCOOdUW8OA>. As sex was all about roles being played, not about relationship, the person doing the penetration was considered the male and the penetrated, was considered as being made the woman.

An argument can therefore be made that the Bible refers to same-sex behaviour by straight people – against **their** nature, not homosexuals, who behave absolutely in accord with their innate nature.

Jesus does talk about marriage, and we'll have a quick look at that because it is the 'go-to' passage for anyone wanting to say that Jesus does talk about same sex relationships. With the best will in the world it's a stretch, but it comes in Matthew 19: 4-8, which we looked at a little while back when looking at Divorce and whether it was Moses, or God, allowing a divorce. We also briefly looked at the verses that followed the ones below, referring to eunuchs even earlier in this essay. Anyway, here is the passage once again, from Matthew 19: -

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ 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'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." ⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you

to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

The difficulty in making this anti-homosexual is that Jesus is answering a question about the rightness of divorce, so is addressing the parties to the marriage and telling them they should not separate. He makes an **observation** about how things generally are, but then making a command. This is not a treatise by Jesus on sexuality, but on divorce – which severed what God has brought together.

There is a lot about marriage in Jesus’ day that we would object to:

- the arrangement of the marriage when the children were young;
- the marriage when they were barely teenage;
- the likelihood that the husband would be much older than the bride (10/15+years older).
- The treatment of the bride as property.

“Jesus does not comment on the highly non-romantic ways in which marriages were contracted in his time, nor on the relational quality of the resultant bonds”.²⁴ Jesus could have spoken on all sorts of issues surrounding marriage, who it could be with, how it could be contracted, at what age, but he doesn’t. His teaching was purely against divorce.

Staying with that Matthew 19 passage, let’s just dig a bit deeper and explore that passage and at this stage I want to add a bit more context to those verses. I need to add verses 9-12:

“⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery”. ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it”.

Jesus is talking about divorce and the disciples struggle to get their heads around Jesus’ high standards and they observe that it is better not to marry than be trapped in a marriage you can’t get out of. Jesus is essentially saying it is best to treat marriage seriously as a lifetime commitment, but if you know you can’t, it is better to remain unmarried, but recognises that not everyone can match these standards, but that there are some folks who can. He uses the illustration of eunuchs, where some were born as eunuchs, others made eunuchs, and the third group are those who have chosen to live as eunuchs. The first two groups are clearly incapable of fulfilling the requirements of married life, but the third group

²⁴ p274, Kingdom Ethics – Following Jesus in Contemporary Context (Second Edition) by David P Gushee & Glen Stassen. Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

are so focussed on the Kingdom, they can match the standards “for the sake of chastity. But here it means such, who having the gift of continency without mutilating their bodies, or indulging any unnatural lusts, can live chastely without the use of women, and choose celibacy”. [Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible]

In Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (written between 1746 and 1763) it also describes those born as eunuchs are:

“such who had such defects in nature that they were impotent, unfit for, and unable to perform the duties of a marriage state; who, as some are born without hands or feet, these were born without proper and perfect organs of generation; and such an one was, by the Jews, frequently called, “an eunuch of the sun” that is, as their doctors explain it, one that from his mother's womb never saw the sun but as an eunuch; that is, one that is born so; and that such an one is here intended, ought not to be doubted. The signs of such an eunuch, are given by the Jewish writers, which may be consulted by those, that have ability and leisure. This sort is sometimes called “an eunuch by the hands of heaven,” or God.”

In Matthew Poole's Commentary (written 400 years ago) he writes:

All men, without sinning against God, cannot abstain from marriage. An ability to live chastely without the use of marriage is a peculiar gift of God, and your saying hath no place in persons to whom God hath not given that gift, for it is better to marry than to burn. There are some whom God by nature hath made unfit for marriage. There are others whom men (wickedly) make unfit for it, that they may gratify their own jealousy. (Thus several courtiers were made eunuchs, and so entrusted with the care of princes' wives and concubines). And there are some who have made themselves eunuchs, not castrating themselves, (that is wickedness), but abstaining from marriage, and yet living chastely, (having mortified their lusts, and brought under their body), that they might be less encumbered with the cares of the world, and be more free for the work of the ministry, or be able more to give up themselves to a holy life and spiritual conversation. But God, who by his ordinance of marriage designed to people and continue the world, hath given to persons different tempers and constitutions; so as possibly the most of men and women cannot without making use of marriage govern their lusts. As to these, marriage is not a matter of choice and deliberation, and they may and ought to use it as an appointment of God, for the ends for which he hath instituted it. If there be any who can receive this saying, who can without marriage bridle his lust, and so live in a solute and single state as not to sin against God by any extravagance of lusts, and impure desires and affections, and desire, and shall do so, that he may be more spiritual, and serve God with less distraction, and be a more fit instrument to promote the kingdom of God in the world, let him do it.

That is the context, and I am choosing to go in a slightly different direction when referring to eunuchs, in that I am saying that if God in His sovereignty permitted/allowed folk to be born with gender issues (alongside any other physical, and mental condition that makes us less than typical physical specimens – and I count myself amongst this group with my lifelong health conditions) and Jesus accepted people were born outside the normal binary pattern of male and female, it is no stretch to say it leaves the door wide open to all the other conditions we have alluded to. From all I have written it is impossible to make the case that sexuality is a purely binary condition – there are simply too many described conditions outside the gender-typical Male/Female. The commentaries quoted above, which were written 3-400 years ago, and I could have used several others, are not looking at the situation any differently to my own thinking. It is only the current non-affirming Christian church that seems to have a problem and needs to apply a certain amount of theological gymnastics to say that being on the LGBTQ+ spectrum is a choice, and not biologically hard-coded.

One thing I need to add, and that is that although Jesus took the Mosaic Law and moved the bar higher in this passage from Matthew 19, he also had the flexibility to set it aside to deal with real life, as we have repeatedly seen.

It wasn't just Jesus, but we can look back to an Old Testament example. Shortly after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians, Hezekiah became king in Judah, and although he wasn't king in what was left of Israel, he seems to have invited not just the people of Judah to a big Passover celebration, but also the remnant of people still living in Israel, but without a king. Some refused, but it sounds like a great number gathered, and they were not all ceremonially clean in line with the requirements of the Mosaic Law. This would have been a big deal, because we have been given to think the Law played a huge part in their lives, except many would have either been following other gods, or at least had only a tentative acknowledgement of God – hence they probably would not be ceremonially clean. In their enthusiasm for God they got rid of the paraphernalia of altars used for the worship of other gods, before Passover came along. The Priests and Levites started to take their roles seriously and cleansed themselves. In 2 Chronicles 30: 16-20, we read:

*¹⁶ Then they took up their regular positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests splashed against the altar the blood handed to them by the Levites. ¹⁷ Since many in the crowd had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs for all those who were not ceremonially clean and could not consecrate their lambs to the Lord. ¹⁸ Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, **“May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone ¹⁹ who sets their heart on seeking God—the Lord, the God of their ancestors—even if they are not clean according to***

the rules of the sanctuary.”²⁰ And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.

There may have been expediency involved – how do you sort the ceremonially clean from unclean, if you have a crowd of many thousands. Answer: Because their hearts were in the right place, just get on and enjoy Passover, confess the problem to God, and let’s celebrate Him together! Read Hezekiah’s prayer again – fantastic isn’t it?

So, yes, Jesus raises the standards, but he also gave us permission to turn a blind eye to the law in situations where the law caused harm or was a problem in real life, and especially if it affected a person’s ability to have a relationship with God. The real problem for us as humans is that we like the law because we know where we stand. It gives us a template, and if something doesn’t fit the template, we know it’s wrong. If we have flexibility, we think we don’t know where we stand, and others will seek to use that flexibility against us. Therefore, we need a close relationship with God and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, continually working within us, giving us wisdom for each situation.

There is another passage that deserves inclusion here and I alluded to it back on one of the earliest pages. The background is that Peter is challenged to go and minister to the Gentiles, and this occurs in Acts 10. He then reports on the experience in Acts 11, which I include here [emphases are mine]:

*¹ The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of the uncircumcised and ate with them.” ⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘**Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.**’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. ¹¹ “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’ ¹⁵ **“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.** ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ **So if God gave them the***

same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, **"So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."**

The important point of this passage is that Peter thought he knew who God had called, but God had bigger plans. In this instance, it was to include people who were not Jews. The clinching indicator was that God's Spirit was poured out on everyone. This should be our test. Is God's Spirit poured out on LGBTQ+ folk? If so, like Peter we need to acknowledge it, and put away our prejudice. If God has called them, **don't you dare** stand in His way!

I know many folk will say, "Yes, God has called them, but he has called them to stop sinning," and my counter argument to that is "Maybe/maybe not. But have you stopped your sinning? He who is without sin can cast the first stone". I doubt you no longer sin – I know I do! In due course we will explore whether the acts of homosexuality are really something we should call sin. Spoiler alert: they don't.

Most of us are aware that the New Testament was written mainly in Greek. However, I understand that there is one interesting fact to drop in right at the beginning of our look at the New Testament texts: the Greek word for romantic love, 'eros', doesn't make a single appearance. Given the themes covered through the New Testament, including Paul talking about husbands loving their wives, and vice versa; this is surprising, because if we were talking about gay or lesbian love, I would expect 'eros' to have been used, because this would have been most appropriate, even if you are more familiar with its use in a 'straight' context.

Frequently, it is us 'straight' folks smugly asserting we are okay and living as God intended, but we don't get a free pass, because there is unacceptable sexual behaviour straight folks must be condemned for: adultery, lust, rape, underage sex, orgies. The fact that none of these are acceptable doesn't make typical heterosexual sex bad! So, I would argue that when we read in the New Testament of inflamed drink/drug- fuelled orgies, circumstantially involving gay or lesbian sex, that doesn't make typical gay or lesbian sex (in the 'eros' tradition of loving, affirming, consensual and monogamous) also bad.

So, let's look at that first of the New Testament 'Clobber' passages, which it is argued, refers to being gay or lesbian. Pointedly, there is nothing to be found in the Gospels, so the first passage is in Romans, and the words in bold are my emphasis:

Romans 1: 18-32: - ¹⁸ *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* ¹⁹ *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are*

without excuse. ²¹ For although **they knew God**, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ **They exchanged the truth about God for a lie**, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² 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.

This is perhaps the key Scripture of all the clobber passages. Too many people zoom in on those two verses 26-27, without looking at the context. When you read it properly, it quickly becomes clear that it is little to do with sexuality, and everything to do with idolatry and excess. Paul here is addressing people who were formerly Christians, or at least believers in God, (the passage saying: "although they knew God" and "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images". When you exchange something, you must have something in the first place for an exchange to be possible.) who turned away and worshipped idols of humans, animals, and birds. The phrase "*their foolish hearts were darkened*" implicitly indicates their hearts had started out lighter.

They had become pagans indulging in orgies, having once known the truth of the Gospel – which is why the passage is so damning. Indeed, it is clear from the text that Paul is talking not about being gay or lesbian, but addressing heterosexuals who had "exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones." That is an important phrase. It seems clear they had previously or maybe even continued to have relationships with the opposite sex, but in their orgies exchanged those natural desires for sexual experiences with those of the same sex and perhaps picking up various STD's has a result. These people were regarded as 'wicked' **before** exchanging natural sexual relations for unnatural ones, they weren't 'wicked' **because** they exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. They

were already 'wicked' because of their idolatry. And as we have seen, homosexuality wasn't seen as an orientation, but as something that occurs in their culture, when one overindulged in sex.

Essentially, the passage is saying that because people deliberately turned their backs on God, and deliberately chose to worship idols in a spirit of rebellion, he turned His back on them and allowed their passions to run out of control so that they sinned in many ways, only one of which was orgies. Whether gay or straight, orgies are out-of-bounds because the worship of sex (as an idol) is out of control and the selfish desire for gratification results in the abuse of others, or the debasement of yourself, and in contrast, the Christian life is about being in control and having an absolute respect of both others and yourself. Being a child of God is about having a Godly view of both your own worth, and others.

The problem here is that this is nothing to do with a lifelong loving and monogamous commitment, and everything to do with instant gratification of what seem to be, heterosexual, former believers in God, seeking sexual experiences whenever and with whomever they could, as part of the expression of their pagan worship.

Indeed, it is quite clear Paul's whole passage is talking about idolatry here, because when he writes verses 22-23, he is quoting directly from Deuteronomy 4: 15b to 18:

*Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, ¹⁶ so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, **whether formed like a man or a woman, ¹⁷ or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.***

You mustn't take one verse out of context to prove your thinking, that is eisegesis, you must look at the whole passage, the situation the author was in, make every effort to understand what he was trying to say, and what his readers thought he was saying. It must be exegetical reasoning, and that is what I am attempting here.

To illustrate this issue of idolatry, Evangelicals Concerned include this very helpful explanation ('Furnish' mentioned below is Victor Paul Furnish - The Moral Teaching of Paul (Rev. ed. — Abingdon, 1985):

Furnish gives us perspective in turning to the writings of Paul. "Since Paul offered no direct teaching to his own churches on the subject of homosexual conduct," says Furnish, "his letters certainly cannot yield any specific answers to the questions being faced in the modern church. ... For Paul, neither homosexual practice nor heterosexual promiscuity nor any other specific vice is identified as such with 'sin.' In his view the fundamental sin from which all particular evils derive is idolatry, worshipping what is created rather than the Creator, be that a wooden idol an ideology, a religious system, or some particular moral code."

In Romans 1, Paul is ridiculing pagan religious rebellion, saying that the pagans knew God but worshipped idols instead of God. To build his

case — which he'll turn against judgmental Jews in chapter 2 — he refers to typical practices of the fertility cults involving sex among priestesses and between men and eunuch prostitutes such as served Aphrodite at Corinth, from where he was writing this letter to the Romans. Their self-castration rites resulted in a bodily "penalty." Catherine Kroeger comments in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* that "Men wore veils and long hair as signs of their dedication to the god, while women used the unveiling and shorn hair to indicate their devotion. Men masqueraded as women, and in a rare vase painting from Corinth a woman is dressed in satyr pants equipped with the male organ. Thus she dances before Dionysos, a deity who had been raised as a girl and was himself called male-female and 'sham man.'" Kroeger continues: "the sex exchange that characterized the cults of such great goddesses as Cybele [Aphrodite, Ishtar, etc.] the Syrian goddess, and Artemis of Ephesus was more grisly. Males voluntarily castrated themselves and assumed women's garments. A relief from Rome shows a high priest of Cybele. The castrated priest wears veil, necklaces, earrings and feminine dress. He is considered to have exchanged his sexual identity and to have become a she-priest." As such, these religious prostitutes would engage in same-sex orgies in the pagan temples all along the coasts of Paul's missionary journeys. 'Paul's conception of homosexuality,' as Thielicke points out, "was one which was affected by the intellectual atmosphere surrounding the struggle with Greek paganism." Says Scroggs: "The illustrations are secondary to [Paul's] basic theological structure" (Cf. 3:22b-23, Paul's own summary), and Furnish adds: "homosexual practice as such is not the topic under discussion." Doesn't what Paul says in the beginning of Romans better describe these pagan orgies he meant to ridicule than it does the mutual love and support in the domestic life of lesbian and gay male couples today? - <http://ecinc.org/clobber-passages/romans-126-27/>

Continuing to look at the historical context, in "God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships" - Matthew Vines addresses these words "natural" and "unnatural" which have become so loaded for us. He writes:

Paul himself used the word "nature" to refer to what we understand as "custom." In 1 Corinthians 11: 13– 15, after instructing women to pray with their heads covered, Paul wrote, "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?" The words "nature" and "disgrace" here are the same words Paul used when describing same-sex behavior in Romans 1: 26– 27. But most Christians today don't read 1 Corinthians 11 as a teaching about God's

design for human hairstyles and head coverings. We generally interpret Paul as referring to the customary practices of his day and the societal shame caused by deviating from them. The way many Christians read this passage is along these lines: "Don't the customs of our society teach us that it's considered shameful for a man to have long hair, but honorable for a woman?" This interpretation helps us reconcile 1 Corinthians 11 with the Old Testament's statements about hair length. Numbers 6: 5 says that men who take the Nazirite vow "must let their hair grow long" in order to set themselves apart for the Lord. Second Samuel 14: 26 praises Absalom's abundant hair, and 2 Kings 2: 23 recounts how Elisha was taunted for his baldness. So how can it always be disgraceful for a man to have long hair?

... As the fifth-century Christian bishop Julian of Eclanum explained it, Paul was contrasting those who make a "right use" of sexual desire with those "abandoned persons [who] indulge" in the "excess of it." For Julian, the moral of the Romans 1 passage was this: "He who observes moderation in natural [desire] uses a good thing well; but he who does not observe moderation abuses a good thing." From the church's early centuries through the nineteenth century, commentators consistently identified the moral problem in Romans 1: 26– 27 as "unbridled passions," not the expression of a same-sex orientation. Furthermore, no biblical interpreter prior to the twentieth century even hinted that Paul's statements were intended to consign a whole group of people to lifelong celibacy.

Before moving on to the next quote, Matthew talked about "natural" and "unnatural" behaviour. Today, few couples take the line that the woman should always "lie back and think of England" during unwanted sex. Instead, and rightly, a "No!" means "No", and during sex they are equally involved, sometimes being submissive and sometimes taking the lead while their partner is submissive. In the terms of the ancient world, this is "unnatural" and to be condemned. In Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible, published in **1884(!)**, the author comments:

[...] Virgil speaks of the attachment of Corydon to Alexis, without seeming to feel the necessity of a blush for it. Maximus Tyrius (Diss. 10) says that in the time of Socrates, this vice was common among the Greeks; and is at pains to vindicate Socrates from it as almost a solitary exception. Cicero (Tuscul. Ques. iv. 34) says, that "Dicearchus had accused Plato of it, and probably not unjustly." He also says (Tuscul. Q. iv. 33), that the practice was common among the Greeks, and that their poets and great men, and even their learned men and philosophers, not only practiced, but gloried in it. And he adds, that it was the custom, not of particular cities only, but of Greece in general. (Tuscul. Ques. v. 20.) Xenophon says, that "the unnatural love of boys is so common, that in many places it is established by the public laws."

He particularly alludes to Sparta. (See Leland's Advantage, etc. i. 56.) Plato says that the Cretans practiced this crime, and justified themselves by the example of Jupiter and Ganymede. (Book of Laws, i.) And Aristotle says, that among the Cretans there was a law encouraging that sort of unnatural love. (Aristotle, Politic. b. ii. chapter 10.) Plutarch says, that this was practiced at Thebes, and at Elis. He further says, that Solon, the great lawgiver of Athens, "was not proof against beautiful boys, and had not courage to resist the force of love." (Life of Solon.) Diogenes Laertius says that this vice was practiced by the Stoic Zeno. Among the Romans, to whom Paul was writing, this vice was no less common. Cicero introduces, without any mark of disapprobation, Cotta, a man of the first rank and genius, freely and familiarly owning to other Romans of the same quality, that this worse than beastly vice was practiced by himself, and quoting the authority of ancient philosophers in vindication of it. (De Natura Deorum, b. i. chapter 28.) It appears from what Seneca says (epis. 95) that in his time it was practiced openly at Rome, and without shame.

He speaks of flocks and troops of boys, distinguished by their colors and nations; and says that great care was taken to train them up for this detestable employment. Those who may wish to see a further account of the morality in the pagan world may find it detailed in Tholuck's "Nature and moral Influence of Heathenism," in the Biblical Repository, vol. ii., and in Leland's Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation. There is not the least evidence that this abominable vice was confined to Greece and Rome. If so common there, if it had the sanction even of their philosophers, it may be presumed that it was practiced elsewhere, and that the sin against nature was a common crime throughout the pagan world. Navaratte, in his account of the empire of China (book ii. chapter 6), says that it is extremely common among the Chinese. And there is every reason to believe, that both in the old world and the new, this abominable crime is still practiced.

Clearly at the time it was written Barnes was familiar with Pederasty, which we have already talked about, and he believes this passage to be alluding to it. I'm not sure that he is right in this instance. I get the impression that some non-affirming Christians feel those of us unhappy with the vilification of gays and lesbians; see the attribution of *pederasty* as the evil Paul was alluding to, and not *homosexuality*, as a recent error to make life easier for ourselves. The fact that pederasty was seen as the likely evil Paul was addressing, as far as Albert Barnes was concerned, is interesting. Personally, the earlier piece from Evangelicals Concerned seems to have made a stronger case.

There is another angle put forward by the author Jack Levison. *"He suggests that the start of chapter 2 of Romans is the key message and should be used to interpret Romans 1. Chapter 2 condemns judgmental behaviour that causes internal conflict within the Church. Those who judge others are themselves*

condemned." - http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc.htm It is certainly worth being cautious in the light of Romans 2:

¹ You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay everyone according to what they have done".

Much of Paul's writings are difficult to understand and are a little like listening to one side of a phone conversation and trying to understand what was said on the other end. Sometimes we know, sometimes we can only guess. Therefore, sometimes it is possible we can get it wrong as the writer of Peter's letters says in 2 Peter 3:15-17: -

*¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. **His letters contain some things that are hard to understand,** which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position."*

I'm not going to make a big play on this passage because folks who take the opposite view to that which I now embrace will quote the same verse against me, because I will be considered as one of those who is ignorant and unstable and who distorts the Scriptures. I fully accept I may be mistaken but, given the leading of Scripture as I understand it, I don't believe I am, so I leave it for God to assess.

Although I am satisfied with the explanations thus far of this chapter, there is a wonderful additional explanatory resource for Romans 1: 26-27 from the webpage http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc3.htm. Please take a break from this and read those notes, because they are about meanings of different words like, "vile affections"; 'exchanged,' 'leaving', 'change', 'abandoned', 'natural' and 'against nature' or 'unnatural', since they seem to be the key words in the Romans passage.

There is reference to an article by R.S. Truluck and the link given on their page is incorrect. The correct link is:

http://www.otkenyer.hu/truluck/six_bible_passages.html.

I feel that page was important, because I could not have phrased it as concisely – no real surprise given that so many pages have been written to get us this far! Apologies that some of the links/web pages have been taken down. I have searched for alternative sites citing the same documents, but sometimes to no avail.

Just to make the picture clearer, Rome was a place where sex was a major part of idol worship. Orgies were commonplace and frequently included same-sex relations (both male and female) as part of the frenzy. There are many other views about which Paul may have been writing about. Some argue he was:

- teaching against Pederasty – sex between adult males and young males, frequently servants, which was rife in Roman society – and which we have dealt with already. Remember Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible, published in 1884 which we looked at a few pages back.
- Condemning all non-procreative sex. The argument here is that sex for procreation was natural so all other forms were unnatural in Paul's experience. Hence that would include:
 - Sex using contraceptives.
 - Sex for fun.
 - Sex where the 'usually submissive' female dominates the 'usually dominant' male.
 - Sex where one or both were unable (whether due to age or medical condition) to produce children. (That puts the mockers on sex for those past child-bearing age!)
 - Sex when the woman was in the wrong part of her menstrual cycle.
 - Sex after a vasectomy (or from the female side, after a Tubal ligation or tubectomy).

Others think Paul was just expressing his own personal opinion that all Gay or lesbian sex is wrong, and it can be treated in the same way as many treat his teaching on slavery. There are other Biblical passages which we quietly ignore, such as polygamy, requiring childless widows to marry their brother-in-law, and rape victims marrying their rapists, as we mentioned earlier. Paul's teaching on "headship" can also be very confusing and widely misunderstood. I'll not deal with that here, but Ian Paul has a short section about it, that is very helpful.²⁵

Still others maintain Paul was using an argument style called 'prosopopoeia' – where two contrasting points of view are presented. It is argued that in chapters 1-4 Paul is presenting the arguments of another teacher, and then in chapters 5-8 he is refuting them by emphasising God's unconditional Grace. It is likened to a TV debate between a Conservative and Labour politician and assuming the transcript was by one person.

That argument is padded out here:

http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc8.htm but this essay needs no extra padding!

²⁵ p.12. "How to Interpret the Bible. Four Essential Questions" Published by Grove Biblical

Anita Cadonau-Huseby is the Founder and Administrator of ChristianLesbians, which has evolved into SisterFriends Together. She has spent nearly 30 years in pastoral ministry, and says:

"I would propose that this passage does not speak of gay men and lesbians within our culture but to the Gentile idolaters located in Rome. If anyone uses this passage as a blanket condemnation of homosexuality within our current world, then there are several premises that they must hold as true.

- *Everyone who is gay and lesbian was first an idolater, even those who realized they were homosexual from their earliest youth.*
- *Everyone who is gay or lesbian is that way because God made them to be homosexual. Homosexuality at this point ceases to be either a sexual orientation OR a choice.*
- *Everyone who is gay and lesbian is without faith and hates God, including those who proclaim Jesus as their Saviour, whether they are practicing homosexuals or living as celibates within the church community."*

<https://resources.christiangays.com/06-romans-1-the-way-too-long-version/>

A friend of mine helpfully commented on that quote saying: *"Whilst I accept the second part of her argument and its bullet-points, the first statement is fraught with danger because it opens the way for any problematic parts of the epistles to be rationalised to another culture, "This isn't for me, it's for somebody else". Perhaps an alternative view might be that the church in Rome faced a problem with members who were professing Christ, without having forsaken idolatry. Mixed religion, after all, had been a serious problem in Israel throughout the prophetic years"*.

In a kind of summary of the Romans passage, Paul gives a vice list and implies that God says that "because they have been so full of idolatry and vice, I've made them homosexual". How many gay people do you know who are idolatrous and can tick off all those vices? I'm sure the answer is no different to those who are straight, and most of the gays will have known they were gay from their early teenage years (probably earlier) BEFORE they will have had a chance to practice and perfect any vices! And surely you aren't going to advocate that God knew they were going to be bad, so He got his punishment in beforehand! First Strike! Not sure that fits his character!

Some might want to still argue that Paul thinks homosexuality is 'shameful' and 'unnatural', but he uses the same Greek words when talking about men with long hair in 1 Corinthians 11 v14:

"Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ..."

So that includes EVERY Christian in the sixties and seventies (I know. I was there, along with some of you! Nowadays, according to my hair length, I must be very

righteous indeed!), and at various times throughout history. Long hair is a fashion that comes and goes.

From my perspective, I can see the appeal of the narrow non-affirming Christian view, but I feel I can have little faith that this is a true interpretation of the passage, especially when we look at the language of grace, and the character of God expressed in human form by Christ Jesus. So no, the passage isn't about the LGBTQ+ person.

For something as serious as this, if it were truly as critical to salvation as many want to make it, I would have expected Jesus to have said something unequivocal. Instead, He says: "...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". Not, "whoever believes, providing they meet these conditions:". Whoever! Then, a few verses further on in John 5:24, he repeats it saying: "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life".

Not only that but if you then turn to the passage in Hebrews where Paul gives us the definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1), Paul goes on to say in verse 6:

*"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because **anyone** who comes to him must believe that he exists and that **he rewards those who earnestly seek him**".*

So, both Christ and Paul agree that faith/belief in Jesus is the catalyst of salvation, and that it is not conditional. That promise is as valid for those who are Christians with an LGBTQ+ orientation as it is for those who are straight.

I would also want to add the comments I used as I wound up the section on Trans where I quoted from Ephesians 1: 13-14 and 2: 8-9, on p147. Take a moment to look back at that section.

1 Corinthians 6: 9-11: - ⁹ 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 male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.

This is one of a pair of passages that seem to talk about Homosexuality, which are frequently paired – the other being our next passage 1 Timothy 1:9-10. So, let's include that here:

1 Timothy 1: 8-12: - ⁸ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers. And it is for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Before I make any comments, I would suggest you read the article on Canyonwalker Connections about these two verses and then come back: <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/1-corinthians-1-timothy-say-sex-behavior/>

Initially let's just look at them as they are and make a few comments. The way the Corinthians passage is constructed, makes it sound like it is a relatively easy fix to stop being a homosexual – or at least whatever it was that has been translated as homosexual. And this verse is frequently trotted out by those who believe homosexuals can choose to change. As we have proved, they can't because it is hard-wired into them, so to appeal to logic, you must infer that perhaps the word *homosexual*, that is used here may not be correct.

If you look at the two vice lists there are two things that all the other activities have in common, that homosexuality doesn't: 1) People can choose to change; 2) Others are being harmed by the activity being condemned.

As I say, the practitioner of each of those "vices": Sexually immoral; Idolater; Adulterer; Male prostitute (why not female?); Practicing homosexual; Thief; Greedy; Drunkard; Slanderer; Swindler, ... can all choose to stop practising their particular vice, with the exception of the homosexual. So, either the word Paul used has not been translated accurately enough, or that Paul wasn't as aware as I might imagine, of what we understand as homosexual orientation, or indeed of consensual monogamous relationships. Bear in mind that sexual orientation wasn't recognised at the time of the Bible writers, and indeed not until the late 19th century.

As for that vice list, I'm not saying that the drunk, the greedy, etc. will always stop immediately, but over time they can be motivated to stop, and there are huge numbers of stories from those who have done just that. In comparison, there are so few **verifiable** stories of gays and lesbians having their *orientations* changed, that the few we read about, are treated with suspicion, and sometimes distrust about whether they were really, truly homosexual in the first place. If you were once truly homosexual, and now you are not, and are only ever sexually tempted by people of the opposite sex, great... I think! If you are gay and still, on occasion, sexually tempted by people of the same sex, then I would say you are still a homosexual, or perhaps a bisexual, if you are tempted by people of the opposite sex as well. If you have learned to act as a heterosexual, but have no attraction to the opposite sex, you are still homosexual if you are drawn to people of the same sex.

Whether you act on it, simply isn't relevant. If a straight man takes a vow of celibacy, he doesn't cease to be straight – he'll still be tempted by women.

Anita Cadonau-Huseby in her essay on the Christian Gay website: <https://resources.christiangays.com/07-i-corinthians-69-i-timothy-1-9-10-words-matter/#more-29885> makes the point:

If the word homosexual appears in your Bible in either passage then you have a version that was written after 1946. Prior to the 1946 Edition of the Revised Standard Version, the words that homosexual had begun to replace in many modern versions included boy prostitutes,

effeminate, those who make women of themselves, sissies, the self-indulgent, sodomites, lewd persons, male prostitutes, and the unchaste. Daniel Helminiak writes that “until the Reformation in the 16th Century and in Roman Catholicism until the 20th Century, the word **malakoi** was thought to mean masturbators” (What the Bible Really Says About homosexuality). Among the early Greek-speaking Christian theologians who condemned homosexuality the words **malakoi** and **arsenokoitai** were never used. When John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) and other contemporaries preached against homosexuality, they’re not recorded as referring to these two passages, and likewise, when Clement of Alexandria preached on these passages, homosexuality was never mentioned (Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century by John Boswell, pages 335-353.)

If church tradition is to be part of what shapes our Christian theology then we need to recognize that church tradition and the understanding of earlier Christian theologians doesn’t support the more recent translations that have placed the word homosexuals or practicing homosexuals within the context of 1 Corinthians 6 or 1 Timothy 1. At different times within church history there have been varying understandings of these passages and their exact meaning has changed from one generation to the next, and now in our present time these two separate words have been collapsed into one to mean homosexual. Along with this acknowledgment, it seems both helpful and honest to recognize that what often finds its way into current biblical interpretation is not a more informed understanding of the biblical text based on years of accumulative knowledge but on imposing our own culture, complete with its prejudices into the interpretative work. What else would explain the shift in meaning and the narrowing of focus in the interpretation of these two passages over the last fifty years?²⁶

1 Corinthians 6: 11 seems to imply that in the church at Corinth were people whose previous behaviour placed them firmly on Paul’s list of wrongdoers, but that they had been “washed, ... sanctified, [and] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” From what we said earlier, although there is nothing in the Power of God to prevent Him changing a ‘gay or lesbian’ Christian to a ‘straight’ Christian, it doesn’t normally work that way. (In the same way, if you were born with skin of one colour and you dislike that enough to want to be another, God doesn’t work that way, even though it’s within His power.) However, if they had by orientation, been straight, but had been involved in pagan

²⁶ Anita Cadonau-Huseby has written articles on all the “clobber” passages, which can be found here: <https://resources.christiangays.com/clobber-verses/>

'homosexual' orgies, before finding faith, one can easily see how, after conversion, they would never participate in the future – especially with the power of the Spirit working with them. I suspect that this verse might be part of the arsenal used by those who seek to 'heal' gays or lesbians of their orientation. But this isn't what the passage is addressing, is it? This is about the process of being made righteous – a spiritual dynamic, not a physical one.

Today there is considerable doubt surrounding the idea that lesbians and gays can be 'healed' because there seems to be some debate that some of the folks claiming to have been 'healed' were not lesbians or gays, but bisexual – but that is a debate for another day. If being gay or lesbian is something people are born with, and that God regards it as wrong, like sin, then He must also provide a cast-iron guarantee that the condition can **always** be healed – every time, no exceptions. After all, we are guaranteed salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus, but this is tangible, physical and measurable. God has **not** provided an infallible "cure", so is He concerned? He was very concerned to provide a way of salvation, so is what we refer to as homosexuality today, not an issue that concerns God. In terms of statistics we talk about 6-10% of people in the UK are Christians. Earlier we said a similar percentage of the population were Gay. As God loves those Christians to the extent that He sent Jesus for them, surely, he would also provide a way for the LGBTQ+ community to become straight? But He doesn't.

Nevertheless, as we have already said, healing **must** be available, and guaranteeable to every lesbian and gay person **wanting** it, just as it should be available to any Christian who feels they want God to intervene in their life. It is wrong however, to build an expectation that God will change an orientation as a result of prayer, because with almost no exceptions, it never happens, regardless of what some Christians claim. They will try and change your **behaviour**, but they cannot change your **orientation**, so don't fall for their lies. Do not trust them. I never thought I'd say that – ever! We will look at gay conversion therapy in more detail shortly.

Anyway, let's get back to the passage we are supposed to be looking at! One of the biggest problems with what has become the "traditional" view is the use of the word "homosexual" in the 1 Corinthians passage. This word was introduced for the first time when the Revised Standard Version was being developed in the late 1940's prior to its publishing in 1952. Prior to this date the words used were:

- *bugger* (1557- Geneva Bible)
- *liers with mankind* (1582 - Douay-Rheims translation)
- *sodomites* (1735 – also Youngs Literal Translation - 1898)
- *abusers of themselves with men* (1885 - The Revised Version)
- *those who abuse themselves with men* (1890 – The Darby Bible)

*The closest meaning of **arsenokoitai** over five hundred years of translation was men who took the active role in nonprocreative sex.*

***Arsenokoitai** did not define what we would call the sexual orientation of a person; it indicated the **role played** in the sexual act.*

Walking the Bridgeless Canyon - Baldock, Kathy. SEGR Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition. p235 (with minor contextual edits to bullet points – PJ)

(Interestingly the New American Bible (Revised – 2011) used the words “boy prostitutes” and “sodomites”.)

However, after the Bible was published in 1946 a young Bible College student named David read the translation, went back to his Greek lectionary and was disturbed to find the lexicon differed from the RSV. He wrote to Dr. Luther Weigle, Dean of Yale Divinity and the head of the RSV translation team to ask him to reconsider replacing the word homosexual with an alternative because if it wasn't, many people would be harmed. After several letters had been exchanged, Dr Weigle was persuaded by the arguments and agreed that the next reprint would correct this error. Unfortunately, this wasn't done until 1971, when the new RSV version replaced “homosexuals” with “sexual perverts”, no longer condemning a specific group of people, but condemning the actions of specific individuals – and that is an important distinction. For one thing, for a sexual pervert, change is possible, and this makes it consistent with the rest of the vice list.

All this is thoroughly documented with a proper paper trail that includes all the original paper correspondence between Dr Weigle and David. For a fuller explanation see <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/forging-a-sacred-weapon-how-the-bible-became-anti-gay/>. I understand Kathy Baldock's book, “Forging a Sacred Weapon: How the Bible Became Anti-Gay” is scheduled for release later in early 2021, and this will include all the documentary evidence from the RSV translation team's archive.

What should be borne in mind is that because the RSV used the word “homosexual” in 1946, and did not change it till 1971, the subsequent translations of major versions like the Amplified Bible (1965), the New English Bible (1970), New American Standard Bible (1971), The Living Bible (1971), The Good News Bible (1976), the New International Version (1978) and no doubt others, all took their lead from the RSV because they all struggled to understand the real meaning of the words **arsenokoitai** and **malakoi**, and decided the most appropriate word was homosexual, especially as society, by this time, saw homosexuality as the new evil.

If you can't cope with that revelation, and it really is a game changer, let's come at these passages from a different angle. By way of completeness there is a very helpful list compiled by the Religious Tolerance site describing how individual Bible versions translate the Corinthians passage. Please take a moment and have a look, as it's a fascinating list of activities that are said to eliminate any possibility of salvation, and I'm sure you'll be interested:

http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_sav1.htm

Although I said it was a list of activities that are said to “eliminate any possibility of salvation”, that isn't quite right. In a sense it is correct, but only insofar as the person does not repent of their sins and seek salvation in Christ, by the time of their death. If they have turned to Jesus as Saviour, they will be saved just as the prostitutes, tax collectors and others on that list were saved after meeting Jesus

and turning their lives around. Don't forget, that there is only one sin that cannot be forgiven, that of sinning against the Holy Spirit, however that works (Luke 12: 10).

Sodomy, as we talked about earlier, is frequently tied together with homosexuality, but throughout history, until very recently Sodomy included a whole range of activities:

- bestiality.
- non-procreative sex, and included under this, acts like:
 - masturbation,
 - coitus interruptus
 - oral sex,
 - Anal male/female sex
 - Other non-vaginal sexual acts (if that hasn't already been covered!)
 - contraceptives
- extramarital heterosexuality,
- medieval Christians viewed women who took the lead in sex, as a form of sodomy.
- even sexual intercourse between Christians and non-Christians (Greenberg 1988, 274-275; Gilbert 1985).

So, many of us today would be guilty of Sodomy in one form or another, but when older versions of Scripture talk about sodomy, what are they declaiming?

See: <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/sodom.htm> by Nick Grier. Professor Nick Grier, Professor Emeritus, University of Idaho, says we should not use the term sodomy today, but "if we should use it at all, [it should be] for those who use sex to dominate, humiliate, and terrorize others". And personally, that feels like a much better picture of that word arsenokoitai.

The words **arsenokoitai** and **malakoi** are going to be frequently repeated during this section, mainly because they were used by Paul, and in recent years have been translated as 'homosexual', in spite of the fact that the evidence for this definition is a bit tentative. As I understand it, arsenokoitai was only used in literature less than 100 times in 600 years, and in the times it **was** used, it always referred to money and exploitative or abusive sex between men – in fact probably between a man and a boy. To reiterate: this is not sex between two people of equal status in a caring relationship. Some see **malakoi** as a term similar to "rent boy". In addition to Anita Cadonau-Huseby's article, which is good reading, there are other useful references dealing with these words here:

- <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homarsen.htm>
- <https://www.createdgay.com/1cor6.html>

Here I need to quote from Anita Cadonau-Huseby's essay on the Christian Gay website: <https://resources.christiangays.com/07-i-corinthians-69-i-timothy-1-9-10-words-matter/> because it is very good and clear, certainly from this writer's perspective, at least. The content is repeated in a good number of other

places/sites, but she expresses it more eloquently than some of the other writers. In the 1 Corinthians passage (NIV) above, the word **malakoi** has been translated as 'male prostitutes'. In her essay Anita Cadonau-Huseby writes:

"Malakoi, on the other hand was a common word in the Greek language and there's a long history of its recorded use both before and after Paul uses it in I Corinthians 6 and I Timothy 1. Jesus is recorded as using the word malakoi when speaking of "a man dressed in soft (malakoi) raiment" (Matthew 11: 8) [PJ - The NIV translates the passage as "A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces."]. While historically, church tradition has often understood malakoi to imply a moral weakness, it was repeatedly used within ancient Greek culture to define those who were considered effeminate. It was occasionally used as a descriptive word for eromenos; eromenos being the passive partner in a relationship between an older mentor and the younger boy or the beloved (Refer to pederasty). Malakoi was also used in a much broader sense than exclusive to a homoerotic relationship but was used as well to describe those men who had too much sex with women for in ancient Rome, the effeminate looking man often presented himself that way to attract women rather than men since effeminate men were looked down upon by the male culture.

In the ancient world being effeminate had a much broader definition than in our time and included such behaviour as bathing frequently, shaving, frequent dancing or laughing, wearing cologne, eating too much or wearing fine undergarments! Effeminate is the best understanding of the word and in its cultural context was threatening to the whole structure of society by crossing the fragile line between man and woman in a world where to be male was to be superior and to be woman was to be intrinsically inferior."

The Religious Tolerance (http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc1.htm) comments about "malakoi" thus:

"The original Greek text describes the two behaviours as 'malakoi' -- some sources quote 'malakee' -- and 'arsenokoitai'.

'Malakoi' is translated in both Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25 as 'soft' (KJV) or as 'fine' (NIV) in references to clothing. It could also mean 'loose' or 'pliable', as in the phrase 'loose morals,' implying 'unethical behaviour.' In the early Christian church, the words were interpreted by some as referring to persons who are pliable, easily influenced, without courage or stability. Non-Biblical writings of the era used the word to refer to lazy men, men who cannot handle hard work, and cowards.

[John] Wesley's Bible Notes defines 'Malakoi' as those:

"Who live in an easy, indolent way; taking up no cross, enduring no hardship. But how is this? These good-natured, harmless people are

ranked with idolaters and sodomites! We may learn hence, that we are never secure from the greatest sins, till we guard against those which are thought the least; nor, indeed, till we think no sin is little, since every one is a step toward hell."

I need to point out that the words *malakoi* and *malakos* appear elsewhere in the New Testament, but never with reference to sexuality. The only time it is given a sexual connotation, is in the translation of these two passages from 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11 & 1 Timothy 1: 8-12, so it may well not have been the author's intent. Please don't think I am questioning the reliability of Scripture. I'm not, but Jesus, Paul, Moses, and the rest didn't speak or write in English, and it's the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek I want to have the confidence to stand behind, not the English translation of their words.

I want to make an observation at this stage and then take a helpful contextual detour. My observation is that if the accurate translation indicates that a "male prostitute" is being beyond salvation, what about female prostitutes, or are they different because they don't count for as much under Hebraic law? You can't go adding additional meanings to Scripture that aren't already there, to make it more convenient or palatable. Paul was to also write to the Galatians that: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* If there really is no difference, what's going on here? And to beat again on that same drum, the word *'arsenokoitai'* is a combination of two words 'man' and 'bed' (about which we will write more shortly), but because it is strongly male, you should not use the word homosexuality, because our word homosexuality, regardless of etymology, includes two elements: being either lesbian or gay. The passage is entirely focussed on the male. So, it is disingenuous to pull in lesbianism when the original script doesn't allow for that usage. That being the case, why would Paul say that gay people cannot be saved, and yet apparently, lesbians could be, given their absence from this list? That seems to present a raft of problems! Maybe the explanation is that we haven't understood what he means. However, if that male prostitute was part of idol worship, and the sex was exploitative or abusive, it is much easier to see a justification for including them in a vice list, particularly as it is a behaviour that can be stopped.

Now that slight detour I mentioned...

Dr Ann Nyland is a scholar of Classics who is an expert in ancient Greek Lexicography. A Lexicographer is a person who studies of the meanings of words and compiles dictionaries. In 2004 she published a translation of the Bible called "The Source" through her publishers, Smith and Stirling, in Australia. On the TheoGeek website: <http://theogeek.blogspot.co.uk/2008/02/proper-bible-translation.html>, the following explanation was given:

In the late 1880s and again in the mid-1970s, large amounts of papyri and inscriptions were discovered. These impacted our knowledge of word meaning in the New Testament dramatically. Why? Well, the papyri and inscriptions were written at the time of the New Testament.

They were non-literary sources, that is, they touched upon all aspects of life - everyday private letters from ordinary people, contracts of marriage and divorce, tax papers, official decrees, birth and death notices, tombstones, and business documents.

Why is this important? Prior to these discoveries, people who made up New Testament dictionaries didn't have a clue what many of the words meant, as I said. But now, these rare words appeared commonly in different contexts, and everyday contexts too. We would use formal language in a letter to a politician, but we use everyday language in letters to friends. It is this everyday language that appears in the New Testament, and up popped hundreds of examples of these words. Large numbers of previously uncommon words found in the New Testament now appeared commonly in everyday documents as well as on inscriptions. Many mysteries of word meaning were thus solved.

15 volumes of new papyri were published in 1976. This meant that the meanings of a large number of words previously unattested were discovered. In the last 20 yrs [PJ - we are talking here of the 1980's-2000's], 4,000 inscriptions have been found at Ephesus alone. These discoveries have been largely overlooked by Bible translators. The problem is that laypersons and a significant number of Bible translators alike are unaware of all this as it is tucked away in technical journals. Available Bible dictionaries do not have this scholarship to any useful degree. BDAG has a little of it, but not much at all. In other words, Bible translators rely on dictionaries. The dictionaries are wrong, for many words.

She goes on to make the case that many translations are therefore not as good and accurate as they could be, and that errors have been made which can be easily put right, if the translators make use of the updated resources. However, it seems that the availability of the new evidence far exceeds scholars/translator's ability to catalogue it properly. In her "The Source" translation, Dr Ann Nyland has taken account of these revised word-meanings, because her field of research is lexicography.

I am naturally uneasy about folks blowing their own trumpet, but on this occasion, I believe I need to set aside my prejudice, because, having read some of Dr Nyland's notes, I believe she has done a very good job. She writes firstly about 'malakoi' and then 'arsenokoitai':

*μαλακοῖ, malakos. "receptive male homosexual promiscuous cross dresser" or "coward," usually considered in this context to mean the former due to its proximity to the following word ἀρσενοκοῖται. arsenokoites- We have no equivalent English word. The Roman equivalent was *cinaedus*. Romans (and it is worth noting that Corinth was a Roman colony) held the *cinaedi* in the utmost contempt, considering them to be deviants and detestable. Such men were*

portrayed as effeminate cross dressers, many depicted with ringlets, women's jewellery, and cosmetics; with women's tastes in general. They were generally considered highly promiscuous and many were depicted as prostitutes. In fact, Martial (6.50) portrays some as exchanging sexual favours for material gain.

She then lists a whole raft of literary and academic sources to make her case, which I have not included here, because if you are interested you can check for yourself, but everyone else will have lost the will to live. I think it is well worth buying "The Source" for all the footnote material alone, but the main body of text is also easily readable.

(Those notes by Dr Nyland also apply to the Timothy passage, because the footnote for that, asks the reader to refer back to the notes for 1 Corinthians 6.)

As a brief comment about that reference to a receptive male "homosexual promiscuous cross dresser" – although it's a colourful picture, this is very clearly not talking about two monogamous, loving, consenting men in a permanent relationship; neither is it talking about our previous issue of Trans*ism. We don't really have anything really matching that description today, so we need to be careful. In addition, I think it's worth asking, given that most of the "homosexual behaviour" in Paul's time was in the form of Pederasty, was Paul reacting to homosexual promiscuity, or the societal acceptance of pederasty, or to the orientation of being homosexual? Or indeed as we suggested just now, could it have been a temple-based prostitution? What was he addressing? Before we condemn anyone, we need to be totally clear and certain, otherwise we endanger ourselves with the judgement of God.

Now let's look at how 'arsenokoitai' can be viewed. Dr Nyland adds the following footnotes to the passage:

ἀρσενοκοῖται, arsenokoites. There is no ready English translation for this Greek word. The semantic range includes one who anally penetrates another, rapist, murderer, extortionist. When used in the meaning "anal penetrator," it does not apply exclusively to males as the receptors, as it was also used for women receptors, e. g. Migne Patrologia Graeca 82. See also Martial, 11.78. It occurs elsewhere in the N.T. only in 1 Tim. 1:10.

*MM s.v. state that it was **first** found among the poets of the Imperial period, which puts it around the same time as this reference in the New Testament. The word does not appear in any of the comedian Aristophanes' plays, which is noteworthy as Aristophanes used a wide range of words for men in sexual relationships with men with comic effect.*

This word 'arsenokoitai' presents a real problem. Everyone with no particular axe to grind, seems to be saying that there is no straightforward translation of this word. On the other hand, those who have a heart closed against the lesbian and

gay community insist it means homosexual – but they present no evidence, only their prejudice. ‘Arsenokoitai’ is made up of two words: ‘arsén’ and ‘koité’. ‘Arsén’ is the word meaning male or man and ‘koité’ means bed/marriage bed and the word is a feminine noun. It is interesting that Dr Nyland says that neither Plato or Aristophanes’ used *arsenokoites* in spite of their extensive writings involving homosexuality. That has to be significant.

Paul and his audience must have known this word and what it meant, but because it is so rarely used, it’s difficult to make a sure case as to its meaning. Perhaps one can complain that Paul could have chosen words that were unambiguous at the time, and if he had, because of their common usage, they would therefore have also been clear today, and I wouldn’t need to be writing this essay. Dr Nyland refers to the “lexical error of assuming Greek words can be glossed as the sum of their parts,” which is what Bible translators have done with these passages. In the article, I quoted from earlier (<https://resources.christiangays.com/07-i-corinthians-69-i-timothy-1-9-10-words-matter/>), Anita Cadonau-Huseby writes:

“In the early work the “New Testament and Homosexuality,” Robin Scroggs comes to an understanding of arsenokoitai by looking at the two separate words it combines; arseno (men) and koitai (bed). From this Scroggs concluded that the literal meaning of arsenokoitai was male bed which he understood as descriptive of the active male (penetrator) in same-sex intercourse. The problem with this method of interpretation can be seen with examples in English like lady-killer, manhole or butterfly. You don’t arrive at the true meaning of the word butterfly by defining and then combining the words butter and fly any more than it’s possible to define the accurate meaning of arsenokoitai by combining and defining male and bed. Again, the very best anyone can do is hazard a guess at what arsenokoitai might mean but a guess is a fragile thread especially when lives hang in the balance.”

Maybe you can also add the words Ladybird, Pineapple, Jackhammer or Yellowhammer (the British bird in the bunting family), and the word ‘understand’ has also been suggested! And here we start the game to find other words like this! Anyway, some of what Dr Nyland writes in her notes is in danger of going over my head, and there is the real possibility that I will lose my way, if I haven’t already, given all this exploration of Corinthians and Timothy! To try and pull it back together again, the main problem is how we translate the two words ‘malakoi’ and ‘arsenokoitai’ in these two lists of vices. I think that in a sense calling them vice lists partially helps to make the point that being gay or lesbian in the way we know it today cannot be regarded as a vice. Let me explain.

The Corinthians passage lists the following vices:

the sexually immoral	idolaters	adulterers
male prostitutes	practicing homosexuals???	thieves
greedy	drunkards	slanderers
swindlers		

Meanwhile the Timothy passage lists these:

lawbreakers and rebels,	ungodly and sinful	the unholy and irreligious???
those who kill their fathers or mothers	murderers	the sexually immoral
those practicing homosexuality???	slave traders and liars and perjurers	

The Expositors Greek Testament talks about the Timothy list saying: “The apostle is here purposely specifying the most extreme violations of law, as samples (καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον) of what disregard of law may lead to.” If we are talking about extreme and excessive behaviour designed to make a point, the quietly monogamous gay or lesbian Christian, hardly by any stretch of the imagination fits the bill – from whichever side of the fence you stand. Other vices on that list include being ‘ungodly and sinful’ and ‘unholy and irreligious’. But what are these in real terms.

In **Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible** they are described thus:

For the ungodly, and for sinners; by the “ungodly” are intended, such as are without God in the world, who neither fear God, nor regard man, who neglect and despise the worship of God, and say to him, depart from us, Job 21:14 and by “sinners” are designed notorious ones, who are exceeding great sinners, always sinning, making sin their constant business and employment; on and against these the law lies: for unholy and profane: such are unholy persons, who are destitute of inward principles of truth and holiness, and who live unholy lives and conversations; and “profane” persons are those who profane the name of the Lord by cursing and swearing, and who profane his day, doctrines, and ordinances, and live dissolute and profane lives, being abandoned to all sin and wickedness.

In the lexicon for the above list, an additional word is suggested to go alongside ‘ungodly’, and that is ‘impious’. Without these notes, in my mind at least, some of those ‘vices’ are so generic as to be virtually meaningless. But Paul isn’t really compiling a comprehensive vice-list but instead drawing a contrast with the godly lifestyle of the preceding verses: “... advancing God’s work—which is by faith. ⁵ The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1 Timothy 1: 4-5

So, we can make the case that with all the behaviours other than homosexuality, specific actions are being condemned because in each of those practices people are being abused and hurt by the actions being condemned. No sensible discerning person will argue that a stable gay or lesbian couple is hurting themselves or anyone else. Consider the additional mental health problems that would result if **that** were the case. To give a few examples – and we’re not going through the whole list, because your mind is as good as mine and probably better. The sexually immoral treat relationships casually without concern for any damage done to the other party – whether psychologically, emotionally, or by transmission

of STD's. Adulterers will have partners/spouses and children/families who will have been grievously hurt, humiliated and betrayed. In the sense that the Bible talks about idolaters the picture is painted of people who care more for their god than for those around them. Frequently those worshipping idols were caught up in religious prostitution, which will bring its own tensions within a marriage. Even looking at the "ungodly and sinners" we see people who have no respect for God or anyone around them. Anyway, you can work your way down those lists and see the harm these actions would have on others.

To my mind at least, pederasty (or sex abuse/exploitation) makes a much better interpretation of what Paul was writing against since there is a much greater likelihood of harm to the young subject. They have little to no say in whether they enter the relationship, as it was likely to be an arrangement with parents. In contrast, Homosexuality in a monogamous, permanent and consensual relationship as we observe today, harms no-one, and instead, fulfils and builds up those involved, and in many couples, the relationship is as godly and respectful as we would desire.

As I've mentioned, the odd ones out in the vice-lists are the references to homosexuality. Homosexuality simply doesn't logically fit into these lists in the way they are set out. In a consensual relationship, each partner is an equal and values their partner, loving and protecting them in the same way that husbands and wives protect each other. They share their belongings, respecting each other, and caring for their partner when they are ill. Essentially, they share all the qualities we expect to see in a normal heterosexual marriage relationship. These are not the actions of people I would expect God to condemn, and if they are to be condemned, I want the Bible to be clear why, and it simply isn't. The argument that sometimes you must do what you don't understand, simply doesn't apply here, because we as Children of God would end up causing so much damage by breaking up these relationships, that God's Grace would be seen as ungrace at best, and poisonous at worst. The church is already in danger of being side-lined by society as irrelevant – do we really want to go down that route? Frankly that doesn't paint a picture of my God who gave me something that cost me nothing, but Him, everything.

Anyway, let's now turn to the final, albeit rather tentative 'Clobber' passage. There are others that sometimes get referred to, so for a background view take a look at http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc2.htm. But, now, for us, we'll turn to Jude, and you'll be relieved to know the heavy stuff is now behind us.

Jude 1: 6-8, but mainly v7: - ⁶ *And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.* ⁷ ***In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*** ⁸ *In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings.*

This is an interesting passage in a number of ways. For one, this is the only passage that alludes to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as being sexual in nature. All the other passages, as we have seen, refer to other sins, indeed Deuteronomy, in two places, indicates it was due to Idolatry. Deuteronomy was written around 1400BC probably about 650 years after the destruction of Sodom, whereas Jude was written between AD 65 and AD 80. Jude was addressing a church that had received an influx of early Gnostics who were teaching that since God's grace forgave them their sin, they were free to sin as much as they liked because God's grace would cover all their sin. Jude makes good use of pseudegraphical books: in this section, that of I Enoch, and later, the Assumption of Moses, neither of which were included either as part of the canon of Scripture or the Apocrypha. With that as a background, although Jude uses the term 'sexual immorality and perversion' there is no real clue what he was talking about. Even within a heterosexual environment, 'sexual immorality and perversion' can easily be labels for certain behaviour (consider group sex, or a "swingers party", which for a Christian would be unacceptable, and there are plenty of other behaviours, that could be given this label), so no real case can be made for an anti-homosexual-based stance.

On the Religious Tolerance site http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc2.htm they make the following comments:

The book of Jude is quite short and only has a single chapter.

The phrase translated as 'strange flesh' in the original Greek reads: 'sarkos heteras'. Ironically, our English word 'heterosexual' is derived from 'heteras'. 'Strange flesh' has been variously translated in other versions as 'perverted sensuality', 'unnatural lust', 'unnatural sex', 'lust of men for other men', 'pursued unnatural desire', 'sexual sin, even perversion', and (in the NIV) 'perversion'.

As mentioned, some translations talk about 'strange flesh' which some have speculated might mean angels, which, if sex were possible with an angel, would fall under our term 'bestiality'. The term sits rather uneasily, but is technically accurate, because sex with any lifeform that is not human falls under this category.

I also want to include the footnotes that Dr Nyland makes under this same passage in Jude. She writes:

*σαρκὸς ἑτέρας - sarkos heteras, different flesh, flesh of another kind. This is not homosexuality, but rather, the union of angels ("The Watchers") with humans. Jude states that Messengers (angels) that did not uphold their own office, are held with ropes in darkness, and just like these, Sodom and Gomorrah went after strange flesh (angels having sex with human women). **The Testament of Naphtali 3.3.4-5** states that the women of Sodom had sex with angels. The passage here in Jude goes on to speak of "these dreamers" (see below note) and then Balaam who used sorcery. In the same verse, he speaks of Korah who rebelled against God. Significantly, Jude states in verse 9 that Michael, the Chief Messenger (angel) did not dare impose a sentence*

upon Slanderer-Liar (Satan). All Jude's statements are related. The context is *The Watchers ... who came down to earth and rebelled against God's ordinances by 'whoring after' humans, and as a consequence God sent down angels with specific instructions to punish The Watchers. The Book of Jubilees 5 sets out the punishment by God upon The Watchers.*

Magic is associated with The Watchers. 2 Enoch states that the people of Sodom committed abominable acts, child-corruption, magic-making, enchantments and devilish witchcraft. Jude mentions the three elements that are linked in accounts of The Watchers, sorcery, going after a different flesh, and punishment of angels. Furthermore, it is accepted that Jude was heavily influenced by 1 Enoch, a fact commented upon by Tertullian in the 2nd c.AD Jude quotes 1 Enoch in verses 14-15. 1 Enoch 6-10 states that 200 angels (The Watchers) came to earth, lusted after human women causing "defilement" and producing progeny. 1 Enoch states that the Watchers taught to humans, among other things, sorceries, enchantments, and the binding of enchantments.

Various other documents talk about that the women of Sodom having sex with (fallen) angels and that children resulted. In summary, it really goes to show there is nothing there that you can really use to say it has anything at all to do with being gay or lesbian. It's pretty much all to do with fallen angels getting sexually involved with humanity. Even that is difficult to get my head around. Genetically, how did that work? What was the biology of any progeny like? There are possibly some clues in Genesis 6: 1-4 and Numbers 13: 32-33. Most inter species mating results in no offspring because the sperm is incompatible with the egg, so the fact that progeny may have resulted from human and angel coupling, I find mind-boggling! (However, my inclination is to assume this is likely to be simply a fable or legend.)

So, let's just sum up Paul and Jude's teaching. What were they in fact saying? I'm using the summary from http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibc6.htm because it is less wordy than I would be! However, to be balanced, the above page splits the conclusion between Conservative and Liberal Christians, and I'm quoting from the Liberal side, because this is where I find myself in this instance, but for balance, please look up and read the alternative summary

The Christian Scriptures are ambiguous on the topic of homosexuality. Paul's epistles and Jude's writing may have condemned:

- *homosexual orgies outside of a committed relationship, or*
- *heterosexuals engaging in homosexual sex, or*
- *homosexual ritual sex in Pagan temples, or*
- *sexual rape of young boys by adult males, or*
- *pimping, or*
- *men raping angels.*

Anyway, having worked through the theology, and found the anti-homosexual content lacking, I find myself apparently in the Liberal theology camp. I have to say I am uncomfortable with that label as I regard myself as a Bible-believing Christian who takes a Bible-centric view of those who are LGBTQ+, although this view happens to differ from most of my evangelical Christian friends. I can take no other view than to embrace my LGBTQ+ friends and share the love of Jesus with them, blessing them in the Name of our Father.

– Chapter 12 –

Celibacy?

So, having dealt with the bulk of the theology in some detail, where do we go now? Since the theology doesn't support the traditional Christian antagonism towards the LGBTQ+ community, the things that result are fruit of the poisoned tree and **must** be discarded. So, let's more closely examine some of these things non-affirming Christians feel are important if a gay or lesbian person is to be integrated into a church. The primary issue is Celibacy, but we'll also look at healing, and then a few other issues.

So, to start with Celibacy. I want to argue that celibacy, where it is imposed by anybody other than the individual concerned, is wrong. It is only ever appropriate, in the situation where the individual has **chosen** to be celibate as part of a "calling". Some may be celibate due to some physical/medical limitation, or because they have never met the right person. I am not addressing these issues. I am addressing those situations where it is imposed by a third party - where you have no desire for celibacy, and your heart is aching to share your life with someone. The imposition of celibacy is always wrong and is not Biblical, as we shall see.

One of the things we, as churches, say to the gay or lesbian is that you can play a full part in church life *providing* you remain celibate. This sounds very reasonable from the church standpoint at first glance, because it seemingly gives the gay or lesbian full scope within the church. There are some major flaws with this woolly thinking which we will look at over the next few pages.

What the church is really saying is: "we still believe you've chosen your lifestyle, but as a backstop, if you can be celibate, I guess we can make room for you".

However, I would argue that if the church says it will accept gays and lesbians if they remain celibate, isn't it tacitly agreeing that they have an orientation that they have no control over, just as heterosexuals have no control over their own orientation. (Don't misread that: I said no control over their *orientation*, not no control over the *expression* of their orientation – we are all called to keep the expression of our sexuality within parameters.) This acceptance of the celibate homosexual is effectively a Catch-22 situation – prove to us you're serious by remaining celibate, and if you can't, how can we take you seriously. We require a higher degree of so-called "Godliness" than we expect of ourselves. The fact is that most of us can't remain celibate ourselves, but neither did God expect us to – as we looked at earlier. God said at the beginning that it is not good for someone to be alone. Enforced celibacy has **never** worked and has NEVER been a **command** of God. It can only work if it is a specific personal **call** from God – we cannot and must not apply conditions to others that we ourselves can't meet. This is different to a married couple, or long-time single person, where sex may not have been possible (for whatever reason) for a long time (years even?), because there is still the (perhaps forlorn) hope that the situation will change. In celibacy, all

hope of a fulfilling relationship is removed, which is why it must always be a calling, not a punishment. Punishment is how the church is using it.

In the third chapter of 'God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships' by Matthew Vines, he writes:

"... what's remarkable about Genesis 2 is that, despite the need for procreation, the text doesn't focus on the gender differences between Adam and Eve. Rather, it focuses on their similarity as human beings. Adam commented only on the qualities he and Eve shared: "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," he said. "She shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2: 23). Adam and Eve were right for each other, not because they were different, but because they were alike".

Then further on in that same chapter Matthew writes:

Augustine, in the fourth century, approvingly quoted the prevailing view that "no one can be continent unless God give it." Ambrose wrote around the same time that lifelong "virginity cannot be commanded" and that it "is the gift of few only." Consider, too, the words of John Calvin, who wrote that "it is not free to all to make what choice they please, because the gift of continence is a special gift." Jesus's teaching in Matthew, Calvin wrote, "plainly shows that [celibacy] was not given to all," so if anyone "has not the power of subduing his passion, let him understand that the Lord has made it obligatory on him to marry." Calvin ultimately went so far as to say that those who lack the gift of celibacy but do not marry "sin by the very circumstance of disobeying the apostle's command." He wrote that lifelong celibacy is "impossible" for those "who have not received it by special gift" and that those without the gift who insist on attempting it anyway are acting "against nature".

History can be interesting, and strange to us: regarding it as a sin and "against nature", if you don't marry and haven't personally been called by God to celibacy!

Enforced celibacy is a terrible price. How many straight Christians would willingly accept celibacy? I was single until my late 30's and like many others, hated it. I longed to have someone to live with, and sometimes life felt quite lonely. However, I always had the *possibility*, or *hope*, of finding someone, which eventually, I did.

You may argue that plenty of people live their whole lives without marrying, or that certain other people with specific mental or physical conditions also have little or no chance of marrying, so how is this different. It is different because most of those people, still retain some form of hope that their situation will change, and a suitable partner will eventually somehow turn up. They are not being told they **must not** find a partner, even if looking from the outside, you might think there is no chance.

However, we are telling the gay or lesbian, you must stay single with no possibility, or hope, of ever finding love. Removing hope is not from God. We are also saying, as Matthew Vine eloquently said in the video, that we condemn the gay/lesbian to a lifetime of loneliness as they live in fear of making any friendships that could potentially become too strong. We require the Christian gay to keep all their friendships shallow, just in case the relationship 'becomes wrong' as we see it. How is God glorified in that wholly wrong line of thinking?

As **The Smiths** sang in their song, 'How Soon Is Now?':

*You shut your mouth
How can you say
I go about things the wrong way?
I am human and I need to be loved
Just like everybody else does

There's a club if you'd like to go
You could meet somebody who really loves you
So, you go and you stand on your own
And you leave on your own
And you go home and you cry
And you want to die

When you say it's gonna happen "now"
Well when exactly do you mean?
See I've already waited too long
And all my hope is gone.*

That song wasn't written about the LGBTQ+ community, but instead, about Morrissey's own paralysing shyness. However, the song is resonant for so many alienated people and has become something of an anthem for those on the edge of society.

I have heard people comment that gays and lesbians could always enter a 'normal' hetero marriage, but a remark like that simply shows what little thought has been given to the person. It also shows a complete failure, and unwillingness to engage with the issue and understand the orientation and feelings of the people concerned, as well as an unwillingness to be Christlike. Indeed, it runs completely counter to the ethics of Jesus teaching. They are more concerned about how their own personal worldview and theology would be threatened, than the hurt they cause. For one thing, as we have established, being gay or lesbian is not something with an on/off switch, it is a lifetime bias. I am as likely to become gay as a gay person become straight. "Gay people cannot choose to follow opposite-sex attractions, because they have no opposite-sex attractions to follow— nor can they manufacture them" (God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships - Matthew Vines).

In the past and even today, there have been many instances of a gay or lesbian marrying a person of the opposite sex to keep a church or society happy. What

effect does that have on their new, straight, partner? They go into a marriage where they might hope for and expect a normal relationship, only to find out things are not what they expected, their passions and sex-drive remaining frustrated, resulting in hurt, rejection and disappointment. Churches must not encourage or force loveless marriages under any pretext. If a straight Christian of whatever gender married a gay or lesbian, how would that affect their faith? How does this bring honour to God? How does the 'straight' partner fulfil God's potential in their own life? It can only happen as part of some real vocation. Every marriage has problems at times, and I guess during the good times there is possibly no problem, but when the times get really tough, when maybe 'love' is taken for granted but never expressed, and when there's more bickering than normal, when stress mounts up, what is there left to hope for? The dynamic is more like an arranged marriage, where it's more of a business arrangement, but those couples have often been brought up from birth to expect and accept it, and even then many young people flee their families. The much more likely effects are clearly described by Mel White in his book that we quoted from earlier, "Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay And Christian in America".

To answer some of the questions I've just asked, I'm going to use a few illustrations. Firstly, I'd like to quote Chris Adams who is currently (2021), on the Liberal Democrat, Federal Conference Committee, but writing here in 2018:

Prior to coming out I had always been taught and accepted (since coming to faith at university) that although there was nothing more inherently wrong with me than with any other Christian, acting on gay sexual desire was wrong. It was partly this teaching and this mindset which led me to marry a woman in my mid-20s. I convinced myself that I was bisexual, because that was OK: I could still get married and have kids that way. I could be like anyone else. That was wrong of me, but perhaps the context explains why I was blind to the fact it would never have worked.

I came out just over two years ago. Coming out meant ending my relationship with my wife, and frankly putting her through hell because I couldn't hide any longer. It's a series of events I will always feel immensely guilty about. She didn't deserve what I put her through. The fact is though I was verging on the suicidal. It wasn't a choice I made, it was a necessity. And as a Christian I remember time and again turning to God and throwing myself onto him – asking him to bring good out of an impossible situation.

My decision to leave was not taken very well by my church. My pastor rang me and said I couldn't be a Christian if I was doing this. Friends who had previously said I could crash on their sofa any time of day or night suddenly said they had no time for me. I'm just incredibly grateful for the small group of friends (some Christians but unrelated to my

church) who rallied round me to support me. I know that having been rejected by my church, I couldn't have survived this without them.

... As things stand I don't want to go to church. I desperately want to worship God openly with other Christians, and be unashamed of who I am. The trouble is, if I go to church, some stupid Christian could come up and sully that wonderful and pure experience by asking me whether I can just stop acting on my 'gay impulses', because clearly, they're 'against God's will'.

Read the full article here: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/02/02/i-tried-to-be-a-good-christian-i-married-a-woman-but-nothing-could-change-my-sexuality/>

It is so sad that it is Christians who stop people from coming to Jesus. Jesus calls us to go into all the world and make disciples, not "go into all the world and by any means possible, prevent people from experiencing the goodness of God".

Around the time I came across Chris' story, in 2017, I also came across the story of Josh Weed a Mormon who from puberty had realised he was gay, but who married Lolly, his best friend. She went into the marriage fully aware of his orientation, and the story of their deep love for one another can be found here:

<http://joshweed.com/club-unicorn-come-closet-ten-year-anniversary/> and here: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/frenchrevolution/2016/02/18/club-unicorn-gay-mormon-married/>. However, after being married for 10 years, problems started to arise, and after a bit over 15 years, Josh and Lolly decided to divorce, and the story is told on the web page below, and the extract here gives a hint of the pain they have experienced:

"... we were suddenly able to see more clearly the pain that my sexual orientation brought to our marriage. It hurt us both very deeply, and we spent many long nights holding one another and weeping as we thought of the decades to come for us, neither of us experiencing real romantic love. We were determined to work hard to help make sure that nobody else felt pressured to enter into marriages like ours, or had to feel the intense pain our love for each other brought us during those long, dark nights." <http://joshweed.com/turning-unicorn-bat-post-announce-end-marriage/>

Each of these couples, Mel and Lyla White, Chris Adams and his unnamed wife & Josh and Lolly Weed, were deeply in love with their partner, but every marriage broke in spite of their determination to make it last. If you are truly interested in how a gay person, can love someone of the opposite gender, I commend all those articles. You'll probably have even more questions afterwards, but you'll also have a lot more love and understanding for folks in that situation. Love can transcend orientation / attraction, but making it last a lifetime is very hard indeed, and is it kind and godly to encourage, or force, it in the first place just to fit in with your theological worldview?

I'd like to quote a further example, that of Jeremy Marks who set up and ran the initially ex-gay organisation Courage UK. He met and married Bren Robson who also went into the marriage fully aware of the fact that Jeremy was gay, but they were both working towards healing those who were gay. Gradually Jeremy realised he could not change his orientation, or others, and the ministry of Courage UK closed. He writes an excellent explanation of his story:

www.courage.org.uk/articles/article.asp?id=77

However, I want to quote a couple of extracts from that page here:

It was many years before I discovered that to live a life that is really a sham in so many respects, pursued in the name of godliness, is a betrayal of one's true self, a gross abuse of others and definitively the most selfish act imaginable. And the notion that there is something godly about this is the pursuit of foolishness to a degree that beggars belief! Some of the most profoundly hurt and damaged people I have ever met have been women married to gay men! For a woman to discover that her husband, in his heart, has a greater desire to be with a man than with her, it utterly corrosive of her sense of value as a woman.

Our pastoral experience over the years has demonstrated again and again that when a gay man marries, this is not only inappropriate for him, but this can absolutely destroy his wife. The situation is perhaps less drastic if he is genuinely bi-sexual, though that offers little comfort or security for his wife.

Near the end of the piece, he writes:

... we must all take responsibility before God for the choices we make. Our decisions affect other people; we cannot just walk away afterwards as if those choices do not matter. And as I understand it, this is the basis of all moral teaching in the Bible. I know that many, perhaps even most women cannot countenance staying with a husband when she has discovered he is gay. It is just too painful for her. In addition, she probably feels profoundly betrayed and violated by this discovery. But my wife knew the facts from the start and she wants us to stay together; whilst I, in turn, have come to realise that I love Bren too much to regard my own needs and feelings as being more important than hers.

Now, if my wife wanted me to leave and if I knew she felt happiest and most at peace about the idea, in that scenario we might agree to formally release one another before God from the covenant promise we made in 1991. We would still to be lifelong friends of course, with an exceptional level of personal commitment, but we would not in that case continue as married partners.

So, marriage comes at a much higher price than we usually glibly think, so, in that context, we look at celibacy. If celibacy is the alternative in the non-affirming mind,

how does the extortionate price of celibacy, match up to the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

That verse simply isn't right when you read the stories of the desperation and suicide attempts of those couples. Please don't try and kid on that celibacy is easy – imagine yourself being forced to be celibate for the whole of your life. We look at the problems in the Catholic priesthood with Priests fathering children when they should have stayed celibate (ignoring that other huge issue of child-abuse). If they had been allowed to marry and have children, would there still have been the same problems? I don't know, but I suspect the problem would be hugely reduced.

Nonetheless, I came across another rare instance of a gay man marrying a straight woman (a mixed orientation marriage). The story of Alan Chambers is told in this article written in 2012, shortly before Exodus International (another ex-gay conversion therapy organisation) closed. Alan Chambers was the president: <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/06/sexual-healing-evangelicals-update-their-message-to-gays/258713/>

However, just as one swallow doesn't make a summer, it would be totally disingenuous to go on to extrapolate that this can and should happen every time. People are complex individuals seeking to honour Christ in the best way they know how.

The Rev Dr Sean Doherty²⁷ seems to be like Josh Weed, in that he describes himself as same-sex attracted - but is married to Gaby with three children. Their story is told here: <http://www.livingout.org/stories/sean-and-gaby>. This is a story worth viewing, because it falls outside the normal parameters I have used, and therefore challenges some of what I have written – so, good on you, Sean! He says, and I find it slightly confusing:

"I was very much on one end of the spectrum, and now I'm not, so there has definitely been some change in my attractions and feelings, and the key thing for me, is that I choose not to identify as "gay", any more".

In that video he describes himself as still same-sex attracted, but also attracted to his wife. What he doesn't make clear is whether he is also attracted to other women, as well as men, or whether Gaby is the only woman he has been attracted to. In a sense that is none of my business other than I am trying to understand the dynamics of what it means to be gay.

I find it puzzling because none of the other gay and lesbian people I have spoken to, as part of my background studies for this work, have reported changes to their attractions and feelings, although there are those I know who have attractions to

²⁷ The principal of the Church of England's Trinity College, Bristol.

both genders, but talk about a stronger attraction to one and weaker to the other, but they identify themselves as bi-sexual, not as gay.

Nevertheless, I don't think Sean is saying that what has worked for him is the model for everyone. I regard him very much as an exception, and would reiterate that mixed orientation marriages are very likely to fail because they will come under even greater stresses than conventional marriage, so be **very** careful. My guess would be that many churches will latch on to Sean and Gaby's story and say every gay/lesbian can therefore find an opposite sex partner, but this is clearly not going to result in anything other than social wreckage. Listen to what Sean says carefully.

As I continue to redress the balance of fairness, there are other Christian Homosexuals who consider celibacy the only option, and you can read Ron Belgau's story here: <http://www.jmm.org.au/articles/22993.htm> (the original GayChristian.Net link has gone, and the replacement site (www.qchristian.org) does not seem to have the resource anymore.) I believe his comments should only apply to anyone God asks to be celibate, not to every gay or lesbian, for the reasons we have just been looking at.

In Matthew Vines' "God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships", he echoes something of what I have been writing but also adds to it when he writes:

Mandatory celibacy for gay Christians differs from any other kind of Christian self-denial, including involuntary celibacy for some straight Christians. Even when straight Christians seek a spouse but cannot find one, the church does not ask them to relinquish any future hope of marriage. Those divergent responses point to the fundamental difference between celibacy for Christians who cannot find a partner and mandatory celibacy for all gay Christians. For straight Christians, abstinence outside marriage affirms the goodness both of marriage and of sex within marriage. But for gay Christians, mandatory celibacy affirms something different: the sinfulness of every possible expression of their sexuality. Jesus emphasized that sin does not encompass merely wrong actions. It also encompasses the desire for those actions.

As he explained in Matthew 5, murder and adultery are sins, but so are anger and lust. So from a Christian standpoint, if all same-sex relationships are sinful, all desires for them should be renounced as well. But as my dad came to realize, while gay Christians can choose not to act on their sexual desires, they cannot eradicate their sexual desires altogether. Despite the prayers of countless gay Christians for God to change their sexual orientation, exclusive same-sex attraction persists for nearly all of them.

Shortly after this he continues:

The failure of reorientation therapy is why the "ex-gay" ministry Exodus International shut down in 2013. It places gay Christians who adhere to

the traditional biblical interpretation in an agonizing, irresolvable tension. In order to truly flee from sin as well as the temptation to sin, they must constantly attempt what has proven impossible: to reconstitute themselves so they are no longer sexual beings at all. Functionally, it's castration. Such an absolute rejection of one's sexuality might make sense if one's sexual desires were oriented exclusively toward abusive or lustful practices. It makes considerably less sense when at least some of one's desires are oriented toward a covenantal relationship of mutual love, care, and self-sacrifice. For gay Christians to be celibate in an attempt to expunge even their desires for romantic love requires them to live in permanent fear of sexual intimacy and love. That is a wholly different kind of self-denial than the chastening of lustful desires the church expects of all believers. It requires gay Christians to build walls around their emotional lives so high that many find it increasingly difficult to form meaningful human connection of all kinds.

Earlier I quoted a little extract of the article written by The Very Rev David Ison, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral for the Accepting Evangelicals website. The article can be found here: <http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/good-disagreement/david-ison-good-disagreement/>. Just now we mentioned the cost of being a gay or lesbian, by way of societal and personal rejection. Later in his article David Ison writes:

*"How reasonable is it to expect gay ordained and lay people, in a Church which discriminates against and condemns the expression of their sexuality, in a wider British culture which only very recently has begun to be more open about sexuality and where homophobic bullying and even murder are still current, let alone a world-wide culture in which homosexuality is in many places punished by imprisonment or death, should make themselves vulnerable to those who may want to exclude them? Will heterosexuals begin the discussion by sharing their struggles and experiences with their own sexuality, including those of their sins and shortcomings which might open them to the charge of hypocrisy, the loss of their reputation and authority, and possible disciplinary action? **After all, far more damage is done in and to the Church by misbehaving heterosexuals than by gay people**".*

Isn't that the truth?!

In the light of enforced celibacy consider this next passage taken from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7: 8-9: -

⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Yes, of course Paul was talking to the heterosexual majority here, but Paul recognises the principal that a committed relationship is far better than being

unable to control one's passions. Jesus similarly makes a comment on how difficult singleness can be. In Matthew 19 Jesus has just been talking about divorce, and goes on to talk about eunuchs, and he says:

¹² *"For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The **one who can** accept this **should** accept it."*

The clear implication is that not everyone can, and that he **doesn't expect** everyone to accept it, but a few will. The context here clearly sees his own followers on both sides of that fence and note: their salvation is NOT being threatened if they can't accept it. Singleness/celibacy is a gift, not a punishment - it is not enforced as Jesus taught in that last passage - and must not be seen as an obligation. At the risk of banging the nail that is already in place, a gift is purely voluntary.

If Marriage is God-given, God-inspired and God-ordained, surely it is the duty of everyone to marry. Single people would then be living lives in contravention of God's requirement (as we saw Calvin wrote earlier). So why then is Paul recommending people not to marry in the above passage of 1 Corinthians 7? And why is Jesus saying we should live as eunuchs if we can? Every one of us who has married has therefore failed that test! Marriage is a very good societal tradition that God honours, recognises and encourages, but singleness is good if we can live that way. By the way, Paul was encouraging people not to marry because there was a major famine in AD51 during the time of Claudius, which would be harder for families than for single people and he thought the Second Coming of Christ was to occur imminently, not millennia in the future. I wonder what Paul would have written if he had known we would still be reading his letters, and waiting for Christ's return, nearly two thousand years later.

If we take a literal view, don't ignore the fact that Adam and Eve never married. They came together, and lived together, but there was no ceremony, neither were there vows and promises made to each other. Eve was created because God recognised it was not good for Adam to be alone and he tries to do something about it. Let's go back to that re-telling of the creation story in Genesis 2:

¹⁸ *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ...²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.*

As a quick theological aside unrelated to anything we have been talking about, it is fascinating to see that loneliness, or at least, aloneness (a negative – something bad), existed BEFORE the Fall ("It is not good for the man to be alone"). For me that lends weight to the idea that the Fall, was not reported historical fact, but a literary device to explain our separation from God.

Getting back to our subject, when Jesus sent out his Disciples, he sent them out to work in pairs (Mark 6: 7), not in isolation. He recognised the importance of working

and being with someone else – a friend who could encourage, correct, build up, share worries and uncertainties, share literal burdens, work, and the excitement of seeing the authority of Jesus changing situations they were faced with.

God made us to be in a relationship with someone like us, and He recognises it is important. It is therefore strange that His children, the church, do not recognise that, and they set conditions they themselves could not live up to. One of the basic needs of human beings is the need to be, and feel, loved. I realise I keep quoting Matthew Vines, but I make no excuse. In the video I encouraged you to view at the beginning of the section on being gay or lesbian

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>), he articulates the extraordinary loneliness of being a gay Christian in his early years of life with no prospect of ever having someone to love, and the tremendous fear that he can't get close to anyone in case a relationship starts to blossom. Is this really what we want from gays or lesbians? If you have never felt the hell of alone-ness or loneliness, you'll probably answer "yes", but those who have known what it's like to be alone, rejected and lonely, will understand.

Do you really wonder why suicide rates among the LGBTQ+ community are higher than in the general population? I'm sure you recognise from the stories you've read that the heightened suicide rates within the community are due almost exclusively to the actual, or perceived, rejection they experience daily. Indeed, the suicide rates among young members of the LGBTQ+ community with a faith, are higher than among the wider LGBTQ+ community. From the many, many stories I've read, LGBTQ+ Christians struggle far more, because they are desperate for God to heal, and when it doesn't happen, coupled with the rejection or perceived rejection, by families and especially Pastors and Evangelical churches, they find it too much to cope with. Whilst the following comment refers to Jewish young people, there is nothing to suppose the situation would be any different among Christian young people.

Over the past decade, dozens of peer-reviewed studies have been done that have demonstrated a clear link to noninclusive religious teachings and practices to higher rates of depression and suicide in sexual and gender minorities. In 2012, the European Symposium of Suicide and Suicidal Behavior released a groundbreaking survey that suggested suicide rates among LGBT+ youth were significantly higher if the youth grew up in a religious context.

(Jewish Press Staff, "Study: Highest Suicide Rates among Religious Homosexuals," Jewish Press, September 5, 2012, <http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/study-highest-rate-of-suicide-among-religious-homosexuals/2012/09/05/>.)

Quoted by Brandan Robertson: *Our Witness: The Unheard Stories of LGBT+ Christians* (Kindle Locations 295-299). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.

To illustrate this, let me quote you the story of the tragic suicide of Lizzie Lowe in autumn 2014 as told by Steve Chalke and Sean Doherty (who we learned about a couple of pages back) to Premier in March 2015:

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2015/March-2015/Is-the-Church-failing-gay-Christians>):

Last autumn, Lizzie Lowe, just 14, hanged herself in a park near her home in Didsbury. At the inquest it became clear that she had spoken to friends about her struggles with her sexuality.

In a statement from St James & Emmanuel, the church Lizzie was part of, the clergy team explained that it had emerged following her death 'that part of her struggle was a battle to reconcile her faith with her emerging sexuality'. In this case, no blame is being levelled at the Church – she would have been completely accepted had she shared her struggle with them – nevertheless, she 'didn't feel able to do this...the barrier was still too high to cross'.

Few churches take this line of acceptance, especially among evangelical churches. Indeed, today, much of the criticism targeted at the LGBTQ+ community comes from the Church. Although there are still too many physical attacks on the community, the ostracism, exclusion and verbal violence from the church done in the name of Jesus, is very damaging, and also adds legitimacy to the physical violence done by that small minority within society. Do we really want to push folks down that road to suicide? Do we want to stop them responding to God's call and fulfilling their potential of a life within God's service? Do we want to drive them to desperation?

Continuing this line looking at the hurt, damage and rejection, I'd like to refer another webpage talking about the damage being done to gays and lesbians. It is an article called "Is Homosexuality a Sin?" by Rev. Dr. Kathlyn James from Lake Washington United Methodist Church, Kirkland, Washington. It is taken from a Sunday sermon in her church and can be found here:

<https://resources.christiangays.com/is-homosexuality-a-sin/>. Please take a moment and read it. She tells the story of Sally, a friend of hers from college, and tells how she was kicked out of her ordination process, although she was the best in the class. Very shortly after that she was fired from her Youth Director job in the church because she was gay.

Things came to a head for me, one morning; when I was standing in the kitchen, pouring a glass of orange juice, and listening to Sally cry her eyes out on the bed. She often did, in those days. Finally I went over to her, sat on the edge of the bed, and began to stroke her hair. I was filled with helpless rage at the world, and fierce tenderness for my friend. I heard myself saying, "Sally, I don't know what being gay is. But if it's part of who you are, and if God made you this way, I say I'm glad you are who you are, and I love who you are, and I wouldn't want you to be any different."

... From that point on, my learning curve was steep! One of my first pastoral calls was to a young man who had just slit his wrists with a razor blade. He explained that he was a Christian and couldn't deny it, that he was also gay and couldn't deny that either, even though he had tried. He had been told he couldn't be both. His father had called him "human garbage" and that "He was not fit to live". All I could do, in response, was to get down on my knees and ask for forgiveness for the church, for communicating to this young man that he was beyond the reach of God's love.

In the five years that followed, I had many such experiences. I had young men with AIDS look up at me with hollow eyes and ask, "Do you think I am an abomination?" I sat with young men calling for their parents as they died, parents who never came. These experiences had a profound impact on me. I kept going back in my mind, again, and again, to my earliest Christian training; the message that God loves everyone, and that Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. He didn't say, "love your neighbor, unless he or she happens to be homosexual." He never said one word about homosexuality at all.

It isn't just in the dramatic experiences of life, but also in the everyday comments that people make, where rejection is felt. I have mentioned Vicky Beeching (the Theologian, Writer, Broadcaster and Keynote Speaker) a few times already, and in a Twitter feed at the end of 2018, two people responded to a Tweet from Vicky. One said:

"I discovered on Christmas Eve that my parents were too embarrassed to tell people they were going to my partner's house for Christmas dinner. They are embarrassed by their daughter's same sex, long term relationship and my happiness is not their priority. It has shook my world."

And the second, different, writer said:

"My mom told me she wanted things to go back to "how they were before" (before=when I was in the closet, miserable and lonely) because, due to my partner's work schedule, I did Christmas EVE with my parents and they wanted Christmas DAY. I hate everything. 😞"

The pain of such people is tangible, and so sad that it comes through thoughtless and careless comments. I'm sure the parents are hurting too but dumping on their fragile offspring can only make a bad situation worse.

In talking about hurt, it seems a good place to read a couple of interviews given by Vicky Beeching herself. The interviews are quite long, but I feel it is important because I want to keep on reiterating the case that orientation isn't a choice, and by telling stories like this, and identifying with the pain, we will understand the situation more clearly. As we have said many times, why put yourself through it, if it were simply a choice? The first interview was given to Patrick Strudwick of The

Independent newspaper on 13 August 2014, when Vicky first came out. Please go ahead and read the full article here:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/vicky-beeching-star-of-the-christian-rock-scene-im-gay-god-loves-me-just-the-way-i-am-9667566.html>

The interview tells how around the age of 12 she began to notice how she was attracted to other girls. Having a typical church upbringing (Pentecostal), she was aware of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their supposed homosexuality, and she was beginning to feel ashamed and alienated because of her own feelings, and the fear of others finding out her terrible secret.

Later she sought help from a Catholic Priest to be absolved, but there was no change, and her sense of shame increased. With this, there was a growing desperation that God either heal her or take her life.

The article goes on to describe the increasingly desperate measures she took to be healed, including an exorcism. Gradually she buried what she really was, to become a Christian singer/songwriter. She moved to the USA but frequently had the experience of leading worship in a church where the preacher would preach against same-sex marriage and condemn gay people to the fires of hell. And all the while, she knew that if she said anything, her career would end, and she would be kicked out for being immoral.

The psychological strains started taking a toll on her body. In the interview she tells how the strain caused tremendous life-affecting health problems and she eventually resolved to “come out” so that her body was no longer under the stress of living the lie of denial and fear.

As soon as the article in the Independent was published, she became a pariah as far as the American churches were concerned, who cancelled her contracts, with most churches and Christian radio stations consigning her songs to the bin. Even British churches stopped using her music, because whilst the songs were wholly focussed on God, they were tainted because of Vicky’s situation – guilty by association. Christians displayed their Biblical naivety, ignorance and stupidity, which was obviously quite wrong. I Corinthians 12: 3 says: “Therefore I want you to know that ... no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.” You’ll also remember other passages.

So, Vicky found herself with no money, no work and health problems that prevented her earning a living. Most if not all Christian shops had taken her albums off the shelves, so there was no income from previous recordings.

She gave another interview with Patrick Strudwick, one year after announcing that she was a lesbian, but this time on BuzzFeed, which was picked up by Premier [Read the full interview here:

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/patrickstrudwick/this-is-what-happens-when-you-come-out-as-a-gay-christian>]. In it she explains the various pressures and expectations she is forced to face, including that she can no longer go to church.

Vicky is certainly not the only lesbian Christian, but she has been one of the most publicly open, and for those outside the LGBT community looking in, she is a real blessing from God as she helps us understand what it is really like when a so-called loving church turns it's back and rejects you, because of something you cannot change. Through her openness and vulnerability, she has saved lives and is God's treasured gift to the LGBTQ+ community, and I truly commend her book "Undivided" as a must-read.

In a Tweet early in 2018, Vicky was attacked (and this happened all too frequently, sadly) by somebody who had a rather pretentious moniker, that implied they had all of God's Truth and Love, but a gracious response was posted from @Bethany26, saying: "Don't listen to the loud voices of the haters. Listen instead to the whispers of the queer Christians sitting in the back of the church wondering if they're going to be ok."

That comment has the authentic tone of the Spirit of God, echoing the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18: 13 – but read the whole story in verses 9-14.

Sadly, Vicky continues to be abused on social media by those claiming to be evangelical Christians. However, sometimes good things happen in her Twitter feed, such as this exchange in July 2019 (for which I issue a mascara warning!):

Vicky Beeching Retweeted

*Be**** @be****²⁸ · Jul 30*

[1] @vickybeeching Today is #OutAndProudParentsDay and i am so excited to declare to the world how proud I am of my gay daughter but Vicky! I have to apologise to you. For my daughter came out to me at soul survivor the day after you had come out ...

[2] ... I blamed you instead of realising that you gave my daughter courage to be free. I wrote to you at the time, I hope you never read it. Please forgive me, for the misplaced blame, for the ignorance and lack of understanding. Forgive me because I now see

[3] you have been key in God bringing freedom to our whole family. Thank you for your courage all those years ago. Thank you that you gave hope to my daughter. I am so so sorry that I added to your hurt. Be blessed today. #OutAndProudParentsDay

Vicky Beeching @vickybeeching · Jul 30

*Replying to @be*****

What a beautiful story! Thanks for sharing that with me. I'm so glad your family are now all LGBTQ affirming. How wonderful :-)

How's the lump in your throat?

²⁸ I have deliberately withheld the full address

So, as we finish this section, Christians seem to have problems with Gays and Lesbians because I think they feel Gays and Lesbians are trying to get away with something they feel the Bible prohibits, but as we have shown this thinking is wrong. So, for me, mandatory celibacy is a total failure and doesn't work – indeed it can be very damaging, and the idea certainly doesn't come from God. However, where celibacy is voluntary, that is fine, but it is wholly wrong to force it on others when you yourself couldn't live up to that standard. In any case as we have seen, the Bible is not against the LGBTQ+ person, so we shouldn't even be talking about celibacy in this context, it is so, so wrong. If someone **chooses** celibacy as a response to a call from God, that's very different, and to be highly commended.

As Christians we are required to challenge ostracism and hate, and recognise the pain that being Gay or Lesbian involves – pain that many of us have never experienced. The pain of understanding why God allowed me to be born like this; can I be healed, and if not, why not; where is my hope for the future; why am I not allowed to love and be loved; why am I rejected through no fault of my own...? And so much more. This ought to mean we have a lot more love and grace towards them.

In Vicky's fuller article she references a Billy Graham quote made when asked why he would attend a rally in support of Bill Clinton, after his sex scandal was made public: "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge, and my job to love." We would all do well to remember it.

And as we end, I want to repeat the quote of Abigail Van Buren (the founder of the Dear Abby advice column) who famously said, 'The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.'

– Chapter 13 –

A look at Conversion Therapy & Healing?

Having looked at celibacy and the pain many folk experience, we come to the sensitive issue of healing. Does God heal homosexuality? That is obviously the wrong question, because, as we have discussed, it is a natural condition – part of being human, not an illness. It is similar to asking why we have different coloured eyes? Nothing has “gone wrong”, so there is nothing to heal. Perhaps a better and more challenging question is: why do **we** want God to take away homosexuality? These days it is more to do with our own personal worldview, rather than God’s. Shouldn’t we be praying for God’s forgiveness and seeking the healing of **our** minds, so we see the Community as God sees them. Then, we need to actively ask the Community to forgive us, for our unloving and cruel rejection.

Some misguided Christians seek to heal gays or lesbians. It has done an enormous amount of damage, which I’ll detail shortly: Christians make “being gay”, either a sin that needs forgiveness, or an illness that needs healing. They don’t see it as a part of what makes us human. This alienates families, and many churches ostracise them. Churches want to make them “better” and “pray the gay away”, which I will show verifiably doesn’t work. This process has wrecked the Christian faith of many people and left many more with severe mental health issues. Read their stories in Brandan Robertson’s book: “Our Witness: The Unheard Stories Of LGBT+ Christians” [Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. Also available on Kindle]

I have mentioned many times throughout this document that mental health is a big issue within the LGBTQ+ community, and I’ve given some of the reasons. If you are concerned about your own mental health, please seek help. If you have a friend you can trust, ask them to help you find an appropriate agency. In the UK you can check the resources on <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/> or <https://switchboard.lgbt/> (the LGBT+ specific helpline that has been running for over 45yrs) who can also be contacted on 0300 330 0630. Then of course there is Stonewall (<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/>). I mention these as they are sources with impeccable reputations, but I can’t really recommend any other specific agencies, because I have no experience to draw on, and agencies change. There will be very good agencies and less good; agencies set up the day after I finish this sentence, and ones that close, merge, or change their names, or ones that used to be poor, but are now good, and vice versa. That said, please don’t suffer in silence, talk to someone, contact your doctor, seek help from agencies like MIND, with a proven reputation. At the end of the document, I have listed many LGBT websites who will offer varying amounts of help, and many of them are Christian.

In a flyer called “Mental health in the LGBT community” produced by the Shaw Mind Foundation (<http://www.shawmindfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Shaw-Mind-LGBT.pdf>) they talk about the following issues that can generate stress for LGBTQ+ people:

- criminal implications of being LGBT (some countries still criminalize people).
- Identity problems.
- religious beliefs (Being LGBT may go against deeply held belief.).
- internal conflict and stress.
- bullying and violence.
- fear of coming out and being discriminated against.
- anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders.

The flyer also pointed out that: *“A Canadian study found that all people require three basic determinants for positive mental health; social inclusion, freedom from violence and discrimination, and access to economic resources”*. So, if we can change the way people in the community are viewed, we will also improve their mental health - and this must be the Jesus way.

In July 2018, after the UK Government agreed to ban Conversion Therapy, ‘Wired’ wrote:

Any type of conversion therapy is based on “intolerant, inaccurate and outdated assumptions about gender and sexual orientation”, Huma Munshi, Equality Improvement Manager at mental health charity Mind, says.

It can lead to “a great deal of psychological distress”, with feelings of isolation and low self-esteem common. Many who undergo conversion therapy end up with long-term mental health problems: anxiety, depression, self-image issues, and in many cases incidences of self harm and suicide. “Following conversion therapy, people might feel ashamed of their identity and unable to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, at home or in the world at large,” she says.

Munshi also points out that LGBTQ+ people are already more likely to experience mental health problems, often because of “bullying, rejection, stigma and discrimination”.

“52 per cent of young LGBT people reported self harm either recently or in the past, compared to 25 per cent of heterosexual, non-trans young people,” she says. “44 per cent of young LGBT people have considered suicide, compared to 26 per cent of heterosexual, non-trans young people”. This data underlines the additional cruelty of conversion therapy.

By Lucy Johnston - <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/what-is-gay-conversion-therapy>
Other related links worth viewing:

- <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2017/07/06/mental-health-challenges-within-the-lgbt-community/>
- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-ex-gay-files-the-bizarre-world-of-gay-to-straight-conversion-1884947.html>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-49679273>

Shortly after the UK Government agreed to consider a ban on Conversion Therapy in 2018, Steve Chalke issued an out-of-sequence Chalke Talk, looking at this subject. It is only brief, so take a “Time Out” to view/listen to it:

<https://www.openchurch.network/content/chalke-talk-36-banning-conversion-therapy-is-still-in-danger-of-missing-the-heart-of-the-issue>

Prayer is one of the key tools used to supposedly change a gay person into a straight person, so why am I and others so against it? Isn't prayer something we should be encouraging? Yes of course it is: Jesus says we should never give up praying, and Paul says we should pray in every situation. However, the way prayer is used by the church when facing someone who is gay, weaponizes prayer in a bad way, reinforcing the idea that being gay is a sin, that it is evil, and an illness/mental illness – regardless of the fact that the World Health Organisation and other Psychiatric bodies crossed it off their lists of mental illnesses a long time ago (the WHO in 1990, and the American Psychiatric Association issued a resolution stating that homosexuality was not a mental illness or sickness back in 1973).

If, as usual, nothing happens when people try to pray away the gay, this frequently has a devastating effect on the person seeking ministry. Sometimes the church will claim that they weren't healed because they didn't have enough faith, which makes a bad mental health situation worse, because not only is the condition my fault, but my lack of healing is my fault as well. Meanwhile the "healer" wanders away with a clear conscience. When Jesus healed people, their healing wasn't solely dependent on their own faith, but on Jesus – even if he did ask one or two whether they had faith. He did that, not to make their healing dependent on their belief, but so that they realized their own involvement and ownership of the experience.

In most cases the 'church' or the 'ex-gay' charity involved will claim the person will be healed of "their condition" and will become "straight". However, the reality is different: although sometimes the person's external behaviour might change over time, as they **learn to behave** as if straight, they never lose their urges for a gay partner as can be seen from the link to the Independent article a couple of paragraphs back. This is verified by the many stories you can read if you do a bit of research, including Brandan Robertson's book I mentioned just now.

As gaychristiansurvivors.com write: "*Homosexuality is an identity, not a behavior. Abstinence and aversion are behaviors, not identity change*". Therefore, conversion therapy must stop, or be stopped – it promises the world, and fails to deliver in almost every case, in almost every way, which has a huge effect on the mental health of the supplicant. As we previously asked, why would God heal when nothing is broken? What is there to heal? It is a bit like a perfectly healthy person going to God in prayer and asking Him to change you – why would He? There is nothing wrong, except in the minds of others. The problem is with them, not you, so we need to be praying for the healing of the church instead. So, affirm and value your gay friends and fellow church members so they are not misled to think they are broken, and help them come to terms with who they are, which in some cases may require some professional mental health support as well.

It's not just evangelical Christendom that employs conversion therapy, in October 2015 the Vatican was reported as sending gay priests to be cured at a special monastery in the Alps.

It has been reported that priests who show "inappropriate sexual tendencies" are removed for "a period of training, personal reflection and enlightenment," according to The Independent.

... Former clergyman Mario Bonfante claims he was told to go to the Venturini monastery, in Trento, when his seniors discovered he was gay so that he can "rediscover the right path".

According to the Telegraph, he said: "It's a place where they help you to rediscover the straight and narrow.

"They wanted to 'cure' me but I refused to go." After he refused he says he was dismissed.

Fr Gianluigi Pasto, 72, in charge of the monastery told an Italian newspaper: "I can only say that here we help the priests become healthy."

The full story can be read here:

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Vatican-accused-of-sending-gay-priests-to-be-cured>

From the reading I have done, that whole area is fraught with danger. Those well-intentioned Christians would cite 1 Corinthians 6, saying that if they were truly saved, they would be cured of their homosexuality and be converted to heterosexuality. If you think that through properly, it is foolish, and the theology is so shallow. It pre-supposes that being Gay makes someone a broken person, and we have made it clear they are not. In any case, becoming a Christian doesn't mean you get healed of cancer, a broken limb, or flu ... or indeed, of anything. A sex worker who turns to Jesus, doesn't automatically get healed of an STD. Your stiff neck won't automatically be healed. I haven't heard or read of a case, but I'm sure one or two people have been healed of some condition at conversion (there will always be exceptions), but the real miracle is that your sins are taken away, and you become a new person in God's sight, even though every cell present in your body beforehand, will still be present.

We know God can do anything. He could make my body capable of winning an Olympic medal in badminton (that happens to be the sport I play best – yes, it's a low bar!), but why would He? What is the point? I'm over sixty, and am not interested in putting in the hard work! However, we know that very occasionally God steps in to heal, and many of us have witnessed amazing things at some stage or another, but we can't quantify in which circumstances healing will take place. The argument might make more sense if there was a divine rule that ordained that every new Christian was immediately healed of whatever was wrong in their body. But the problem there, would be that faith would no longer be required, since healing would always follow conversion - go on, think it through. You'd probably then get queues of people wanting to become Christians, and for the wrong reasons. If your mind is like mine, you'll already be thinking up problem scenarios and quirks, so we won't dive down that rabbit-hole!

Anyway, this is not the case and you can't make a comment like this about sexual identity, when it doesn't happen in any other situation. Indeed, there is no magic prayer, formula, routine, activity, Bible verse you can read, that will guarantee your healing. There has never been a situation where every person with cancer/asthma/Autism/common cold/heart problems was healed. Instead, healing is an act of God's grace, which can happen at unforeseen and unpredictable times. I suspect my own healing will happen when I die and meet our Lord, and receive my resurrection body, and as I've already said, at death, gender will be irrelevant and probably not required, so everyone bothered by issues of sexuality will wonder what all the fuss was about.

As we have said, seeking healing presupposes something is wrong that needs to be put right, so if Homosexuality is an identity, and a natural part of being human, it is no surprise that praying for healing from Homosexuality just doesn't work, as we can see from the example of Exodus International. This was the largest ministry set up to help gay Christians, but closed its doors in July 2013, but prior to their closure, they stopped talking of "curing" same-sex attraction, where for years, that was their stance:

- *The American Psychological Association warns that homosexuality is not a disorder, and that trying to "cure" it can lead to "intimacy avoidance, sexual dysfunction, depression, and suicidality." Founding Exodus leader Michael Bussee says he witnessed those harrowing outcomes firsthand. Bussee, who left the group in 1979 and now lives an openly gay life, recalls watching his Exodus clients descend into despair, mutilating their own bodies or driving their cars into trees. "By calling ourselves ex-gay," Bussee says now, "we were lying to ourselves and hurting people."*
<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/06/sexual-healing-evangelicals-update-their-message-to-gays/258713/>.
- *Co-Founder Michael Bussee left the group in 1979 and entered a relationship with another Exodus leader, Gary Cooper. Bussee would later admit, "I never saw one of our members or other Exodus leaders or other Exodus members become heterosexual, so deep down I knew that it wasn't true." Throughout the 1980s and '90s [sic], many former Exodus members became vocal critics of the ministry, claiming it had caused them psychological distress.*
... By this point, the ex-gay movement was already in shambles. A 2013 Pew Research poll showed that only 36 percent of Americans believe a gay or lesbian person's orientation can be changed. As Satcher reported, modern science had delivered crushing blows to the ex-gay movement with peer-reviewed research showing that its ideology was bunk. And a national movement to ban reparative therapy for minors was taking shape and had already been successful in several states.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/the-man-who-dismantled-the-ex-gay-ministry/408970/>

- In 2012, the “President of Exodus International, Alan Chambers, spoke ... as a part of a panel discussion at the annual conference of the Gay Christian Network. [View it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXgA7_QRvhg] During the discussion, Alan Chambers is asked, I think by GCN Executive Director Justin Lee, about the way Exodus and member ministries describe the work they do. Specifically, Lee asked about the slogan “change is possible.” Chambers responds by discussing his views of sexual orientation change, saying:

The majority of people that I have met, and I would say the majority meaning 99.9% of them have not experienced a change in their orientation or have gotten to a place where they could say that they could never be tempted or are not tempted in some way or experience some level of same-sex attraction. I think there is a gender issue there, there are some women who have challenged me and said that my orientation or my attractions have changed completely. Those have been few and far between. The vast majority of people that I know will experience some level of same-sex attraction.

There was also some discussion of change, meaning a change of viewpoint and behavior but the consensus was that Chambers was giving an honest appraisal of the aspect of sexuality that involves essential attractions. As one who once defended sexual reorientation change efforts, I have to agree with Chambers’ assessment. Credible reports of change are rare and do come more often from women than men.” <https://www.wthrockmorton.com/2012/01/09/alan-chambers-99-9-have-not-experienced-a-change-in-their-orientation/>

[The YouTube clip I mentioned is about 2½ hours long but is worth watching as it gives a wider view of the Ex-Gay ministries and the deep, deep hurt they caused, than I as an outsider, can give. The above quote from Alan Chambers occurs at about 1hr 9 mins 45 secs. As mentioned in the discussion, the problem with the many ex-gay ministries is that implicitly, if not directly explicitly, they don’t just promise that homosexual **behaviour** will change, but that homosexual **attraction** will be changed, and this simply isn’t supported by the facts. Please watch it.]

When Exodus International closed a short time after this discussion took place, Alan Chambers closed the organization with a public apology to the LGBTQ+ community, saying that “For quite some time we’ve been imprisoned in a worldview that’s neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical.” He remarked that he will now seek to create “safe, welcoming and mutually transforming communities.” In the years leading up to 2013, Alan gradually found his thinking changing, and he comments that: “As I heard more stories and

evaluated my own realities, I realized change in orientation was not possible or happening.”

The stance of Exodus International is significant because they had been operating for over 40 years, believing gays can be changed, so they would no longer be same sex attracted. This is achieved by “reparative therapy - a holistic, counselling approach to addressing unwanted same-sex attraction - can be a beneficial tool.”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exodus_International#cite_note-ExodusPolicy-6

They were an umbrella organisation (closely associated with Protestant and evangelical denominations) for hundreds of smaller groups and organisations, who, in the main, still operate. However, the fact that this long-standing interdenominational organisation realised it simply wasn't achieving what it set out to do, should give pause for realistic consideration. We cannot assert God will “heal the homosexual” – there simply isn't the evidence.

Exodus International are not the only ones changing their stance. In articles I've read, it appears a good number of similar organisations have closed across the US, and there is a call for these types of agencies to be closed in the UK. In 2015:

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has called on therapy, given to gay people to help them get rid of same sex attraction, to be banned.

The government minister, who is also a Christian, has been speaking at the PinkNews Awards.

While presenting an award, Mrs Morgan, who is also Minister for Women and Equalities, said: “I was shocked to discover that 1 in 10 social and healthcare staff have heard colleagues express the belief that someone can be cured of being gay.

“Let me be clear: gay cure therapies have no place in our countries and we must stamp them out.”

Nicky Morgan's view on homosexuality has made news previously. She first voted against government proposals to legalise same-sex marriage but later changed her mind on the issue.

While therapy to help people change sexual orientation is legal in the UK, many counselling and health groups have spoken about the harm it can cause and have effectively banned their members from carrying it out.

But many Christian groups still promote the idea.

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Nicky-Morgan-We-must-stamp-out-gay-cure-therapies>

If professionals in the field are stating that these ‘treatments’ are verifiably harmful, what the heck are Christians doing promoting them? Harmful treatments fly in the face of our Christian ethos. Possibly the only answer is that we must ignore inconvenient facts because our personal theology demands/requires us to.

The good news was that in mid-2018, the UK government began the process of banning conversion therapy, which hopefully will start to protect our gay sisters and brothers. Sadly, Christian organisations see it as a direct attack on Christianity. Now in 2021, the government are still dragging their feet, but I am hopeful things will start to move shortly.

There is another example described here. It is the story of Jeremy Marks who we read about earlier. There are some striking parallels to the earlier Exodus International story:

In the meantime, I had got married (in 1991) as a “step of faith”. But even though I was always committed to obeying the will of God (as I perceived it), it was not long before I realised that nothing had changed my orientation, a fact that was just as difficult for my wife as for me. I was able to lead a faithful and celibate life, but mainly because I found value and affirmation in running the ministry. However, for others who married and did not have that kind of encouragement, divorce often followed eventually [a] few years later (with just a few exceptions amongst those of us brought up with a very duty-orientated mindset).

Download the article as an .rtf file from

<http://www.jeremymarks.me.uk/history-of-courage/4560632639>

In that article, Jeremy talks about his observations that, after setting up a loving Christian community for gays, the ministry just wasn't working:

All went well, more or less, until gradually the people who had come to us (from all over the world in fact) reached the point where they had to go home. Leaving behind that loving and supportive community exposed the truth—that nothing had actually changed in their orientation at all. So they began to feel all the more alone, wondering what this experience of total dedication to Christ could have meant if it had not led to the change we all felt sure would come—especially when graduates of our discipleship programme found that the temptations to desire and seek a same-sex partnership were as strong and deeply-rooted as ever. Many lost their faith as a result; some became deeply depressed to the point of despair; some even became suicidal. As a pastor committed to helping people to grow in their faith, I found the situation quite heart-breaking, and this led to much soul-searching.

... By the mid 1990's, we'd had to close our residential houses, for various reasons (not least of those being the fact that the project had become more or less insolvent). This gave me more time to think, and carefully consider what we had been doing. Increasingly I felt that not only had our vision not been fulfilled, but worse—we had set people up with a tremendous expectation for healing based on a false hope, a specious illusion—that deliverance from unwanted same-sex desires

would come if only we were prepared to struggle hard enough and for long enough. Seeing the experience of other ministries, especially those in the USA who had been going for much longer, made me gradually realise that we were never going to see our vision fulfilled. On the contrary, increasingly I could see that the only people who were doing at all well were those who came to the point of accepting that they are gay, and found a same-sex partner. The majority became more and more dysfunctional in life, as long as they suppressed what I eventually realised was their/our true sexuality.

I am utterly convinced God can and does heal – and permanently, but statistically, it’s rare, and as I have already argued, why would healing be needed if there’s nothing to be healed of? You can get surgery for various cosmetic problems, but God doesn’t step in to change and heal to prevent the need for cosmetic surgery – even if you are a Christian who has suffered a tremendous injury or burns. Maybe we need to recognise that LGBTQ+ folk are made in the image of God, and that the problem is not with the person, but with ourselves: our worldview, our theology, the church and society? The fault and failure is **ours** - the LGBTQ+ community deserves a huge apology, and **we** need to repent before God.

Just to take that logic on a step. The non-affirming faith communities say that the LGBTQ+ community will be the fuel for the fires of hell because of their sin. However, all Christians say that God is passionate in His desire to bring folk into His kingdom to enjoy a close relationship with Him. That being the case, when a gay person becomes a Christian and repents of their sin, in the same way I did in the early ‘70’s, why would God NOT automatically heal, because if it is as apparently as obnoxious an offence to God, as folk contend, yet the gay person in their very core cannot do anything about being homosexual, it flies in the face of His character and nature not to heal. Without God’s mercy, I am powerless to do anything about my sin, just as the gay person is additionally powerless to be anything other than gay. God grants me salvation and forgives my sin. If the erasure of homosexuality was so important to Him, logic requires he should welcome every gay sinner who repents and give them both salvation, AND guaranteed ‘healing’ from homosexuality. As there are so many spirit-filled ‘Gay’ Christians, obviously God doesn’t see it as a problem. To me, the conclusion is very clear, and to ignore that, is a sin in itself, because of the damage done.

Earlier, towards the beginning of the section on being Gay or Lesbian, I quoted from Philip Yancey, telling the story of the Rev Dr Mel White. From his story you can see the lengths folk go to, to be healed. Healing just didn’t happen, and that will be the story from many Christian Gay and Lesbian folks. How many Christians have a problem with lust: they fight temptation, they pray for healing, and nothing much changes? They may become stronger and more determined, but that lust is still there. Consider those TV evangelists who have been caught out by the #MeToo wave. Yet we get exercised about folk who are Gay or

Lesbian, insisting that they be healed, when we ourselves haven't been. Hmm... double standards? – I think so. Pharisees are alive and well, telling me God's message each week and they sit next to me in church. I'm probably one myself in a different area. Earlier on in the section on Trans, I spoke about healing and how I had been told my lack of healing was due to my lack of faith, but pointed out that Jesus could heal even when someone lacked faith (Mark 9: 23-24). As I said earlier: *"Telling someone they haven't been healed due to a lack of faith can be incredibly damaging, so don't do it, don't even be tempted."*

In an article written by Jeremy Lelek on behalf of "The Association of Biblical Counselors" (ABC exists to encourage, equip, and empower people everywhere to live and counsel the Word, applying the Gospel to the whole experience of life.) he writes:

"... would we ever tell a married man who struggles with lust that we are going to take him through a therapeutic intervention where he will become solely attracted to his wife? Would we raise his hopes that upon completing therapy he will not wrestle with attraction towards other women ever again—that his lust for others will be eradicated from his heart? I certainly would make no such promises, and the Bible doesn't either. This line of reasoning would be akin to telling a depressed or anxious counselee that because he has counseled with me he will never experience depression, sadness, anxiety or fear again. This logic completely denies the brokenness in our hearts caused by depravity, and sets a dangerous foundation for condemnation and despair."

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/association-of-biblical-counselors/3-powerful-gospel-truths-for-addressing-homosexuality.html>

There is another angle to this, and I was surprised it came from Katy Perry, whose music doesn't really scratch where I'm itching. I like my music with a harder rock edge! However, in March 2017 Marcus Jones on behalf of Premier wrote about her saying:

The singer Katy Perry said her Christian upbringing led her to believe it was possible to "pray the gay away" when she was a youngster.

Accepting an award for LGBT advocacy at the Human Rights Campaign Gala on Saturday, the daughter of two pastors said she spent much of her youth attending religious schools and camps.

In her acceptance speech, the singer said when she was growing up, "homosexuality was synonymous with the word 'abomination'."

She added that she "prayed the gay away at Jesus camps."

She also told the crowd that she had since come to terms with her own sexuality.

Perry, 32, said that there was a lot of truth in her hit song I Kissed a Girl.

“Truth be told, I did more than that. But how was I going to reconcile that with the gospel-singing girl raised in youth groups that were pro-conversion camps?” she told the audience.

“What I did know was that I was curious and even then, I knew sexuality wasn’t as black and white as this dress.

“Honestly, I haven’t always gotten it right, but in 2008 when that song came out, I knew that I started a conversation that a lot of the world seemed curious enough to sing along to.”

Before finding success under the stage name Katy Perry, the superstar released an album of Christian gospel songs as Katy Hudson in 2001.

From: <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Katy-Perry-I-was-taught-to-pray-gay-away>

Clearly, that doesn’t tell the whole story, but reading between the lines we can put together the pain, the guilt, and the loneliness of her earlier years, but it seems she has now come to terms with who she is. And why do we even need to use that expression, “come to terms”? Doesn’t that expression demonstrate that there is no choice in the persons realised sexuality. Once again I reiterate, I never made a choice to be straight or gay – I just developed the way I did.

I also add that once gays or lesbians have accepted their situation; why would they necessarily want to be healed? They may be in a loving and caring relationship that is honouring to both partners. On the other hand, some may be crying in their sleep with the loneliness, rejection and isolation and would long to be different. Whether change of orientation is the best thing will probably depend on the circumstance, so I have to leave that to God to deal with as He sees fit, but my personal feeling is that it is wrong to raise hopes and expectations and expect God to heal or ‘put right’ (assuming it is correct to “put right”) in this instance. In this context, don’t forget the question I raised earlier in the essay: How many utterly verifiable spectacular miracles have you witnessed *personally*? You cannot include anything from press or TV, because the media lies – or at least presents a distorted view to sell copy, and you haven’t seen the lead up, or the results/situation weeks / months later. If you visited that person 6 months, a year, two years later would they be symptom free, or would they still be wrestling with their symptoms. I have come across folk who have been “healed” in a service but whose symptoms have returned a short time later. Theologically I can’t explain that. Did adrenaline or some other chemical, take away the pain? We need to be careful to only call something a ‘healing’, when it has verifiably happened – and then give God proper praise for it.

We have been kind of talking 'around' the Ex-Gay Ministries, but we haven't said much about them. I don't want to spend much time outlining treatments as this text is already far too long but look up 'Conversion Therapy' on Wikipedia. However, I found the following which you may find informative, if not horrifying.

In the past, some mental health professionals resorted to extreme measures such as institutionalization, castration, and electroconvulsive shock therapy to try to stop people from being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Today, while some counselors still use physical treatments like aversive conditioning, the techniques most commonly used include a variety of behavioral, cognitive, psychoanalytic, and other practices that try to change or reduce same-sex attraction or alter a person's gender identity. While these contemporary versions of conversion therapy are less shocking and extreme than some of those more frequently used in the past, they are equally devoid of scientific validity and pose serious dangers to patients—especially to minors, who are often forced to undergo them by their parents or legal guardians, and who are at especially high risk of being harmed.

According to a 2009 report of the American Psychological Association, the techniques therapists have used to try to change sexual orientation and gender identity include inducing nausea, vomiting, or paralysis while showing the patient homoerotic images; providing electric shocks; having the individual snap an elastic band around the wrist when aroused by same-sex erotic images or thoughts; using shame to create aversion to same-sex attractions; orgasmic reconditioning; and satiation therapy. Other techniques include trying to make patients' behavior more stereotypically feminine or masculine, teaching heterosexual dating skills, using hypnosis to try to redirect desires and arousal, and other techniques—all based on the scientifically discredited premise that being LGBT is a defect or disorder.

<http://www.nclrights.org/bornperfect-the-facts-about-conversion-therapy/>

Can you as a Christian really advocate treatments like that, and keep a clear conscience before your Lord?

I would also want to add that some Christian Ex-Gay Ministries are more than a little deceitful in that they talk about healing the gay/lesbian, when really all they do is to change their behaviour, but not their orientation. So, the patient goes to them expecting to be cured, only to find at the end of the process, their orientation is unchanged, but they have been taught how to appear straight! If you have followed every link, reading all the articles, and watching the videos, you will have a lot more detail than I've written here.

If you want to ask me why I am so against treatment to change gays, and yet am fully supportive of treatment to change those who are Trans and wish to change to their assumed gender, I think the answer is quite straightforward. If you are asking

the question, it shows that you, like me, are not part of the LGBT community, because for them it is self-evident. But for me standing on the outside, on the one-hand, there is now verifiably good science and hugely improved surgical techniques with improving final results (though not without risks) in the treatment of those who are trans*, but there are no psychological or medical treatments that can make a gay person, straight. In addition, with regard to those who are gay, there is absolutely no scientifically verifiable data and only a handful of people claiming a change in their sexual orientation has occurred, and these cannot be objectively verified. In addition, we can read so many stories of people who have been badly damaged by the whole experience, so instead of being agents of healing, the therapists have been agents of harm. Verification is crucial in the development of any science.

Yes, there will be a Trans person here or there who regrets their transition, but that can never be a reason to stop surgeries. I'm sure it will be right to delay surgical methods until you have been convinced the person is utterly convinced that it is what they really, really want. On the other hand, just because an unverifiable gay person here or there superficially **seems** to benefit from an Ex-Gay therapy, it doesn't prove it works, there may have been other factors involved that we are not privy to. Then, when you add in the proven damage it does, it is demonstrably wrong, and utterly against the heart of Jesus' teaching.

– Chapter 14 –

Disagreement, faith differences and some final thoughts.

Christians tend to fall into two camps: those who say they are upholding the teachings of Scripture (by keeping the gay community at arm's length, in view of their perceived sin). Then there are those who read Scripture differently and see Jesus as someone who would willingly embrace His LGBT child. However, we all too often worship in the same church, and we must find ways to get along, even though the arguments can get quite passionate.

Gays or lesbians do not get the same rights as the rest of us although that is gradually changing. In the UK we have what is regarded as the tradition of marriage between a man and a woman. We also now have marriage for same-sex couples and Civil partnerships. What is the difference?

Same sex couples in the UK can currently choose between a civil partnership and marriage, a choice which was also made available to heterosexual couples in 2019.

Surprisingly though, the differences between marriage and a civil partnership are not significant and include the following:

- For legal purposes, civil partners cannot call themselves 'married', and married couples cannot refer to themselves as being 'civil partners'.
- When it comes to getting a divorce or dissolution, adultery cannot be stated as grounds for dissolving a civil partnership, but can for marriage.
- Civil partnership certificates include the names of both parents, whereas marriage certificates only contain the father's name.
- Civil partnerships are registered by signing the civil partnerships document, whereas marriages are solemnised by saying a prescribed form of words.

What are the similarities between marriage and civil partnerships?

There are a number of similarities between same sex marriage and civil partnerships, the main one being that you can seek a divorce or dissolution on the same grounds (other than adultery).

The grounds for divorce or dissolution are:

- Unreasonable behaviour
- Desertion for two years
- Separation for two years (with the respondent's consent to the divorce or dissolution)
- Separation for five years (with no consent required)

In both civil partnerships and same sex marriage, couples have to be over the age of 18, or 16 with parent's permission, and not be already married or in a civil partnership.

<https://barcankirby.co.uk/same-sex-marriage-civil-partnerships-difference/>

However, I think I had better jump in and say that the word 'Marriage' means different things to different people. I am not an Anglican, but I remember being a bit frustrated with a discussion where an Anglican was insisting what he was calling 'Marriage' was different to the way I was portraying it, but I couldn't get to grips with exactly *how* they were different. The only area of difference I could see was in the gift of biological children for the parent, which is more difficult in a marriage of two women/men, but even then, is not impossible, though there are extra ethical issues to consider. Some Christian couples can't conceive, so they try IVF or adoption. Any children they bring up may be just as much a Gift from God, which would be similar for those in the LGBTQ+ community, so I'm struggling to understand, and happily admit I may be wrong in my portrayal.

When I say the name "Jesus" I have a certain picture in my mind, which may be similar to many other Christians (my Saviour, the Son of God, etc), but when a Muslim utters the same Name, they have a very different picture in their mind (an important prophet). To my mind, it seems the same applies within Anglicanism with the word 'Marriage'. Hence, they are reluctant to talk about 'Marriage' being possible for the LGBT+ community, and then in the next breath they'll commend 'civil partnership' which has similarities but not quite the same equivalence to marriage. To me, it seems they have been bound by historical man-devised interpretation of a divine Institution. If, as I have argued, LGBTQ+ folks can make life-long commitments to each other before their Saviour, how can I not see them as married, in the same way we would say the Muslim couple next door are 'married', as are the Mormon couple down the road, along with the Roman Catholics opposite, and the atheists and agnostics between all of them! In each case we use the term 'married' to refer to the nature of their relationship, just as we do when referring to 'common-law' marriage, 'arranged' marriage, or 'under-age' marriage. We use the word 'Marriage' in each case. We don't have Marriage Plus or Marriage Minus, or Marriage 2.0, or Marriage Lite!

I believe that most of society regards marriage as a life-long commitment made in the presence of others. If they are people of faith there may be a celebration made in the presence of God, or whatever gods the couple recognise, depending on whether you are Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Pagan, or some other faith.

So, when I said just now that we have "marriage for same-sex couples and Civil partnership", it seems the Anglican hierarchy would balk at my use of the word 'marriage', but to my mind, we need to have an equivalence for the Christian who is LGBTQ+, because otherwise, what we offer is perceived as another watered-down and second-class ordinance, which conveys the wrong impression, and is offensive.

In general, rights are fairly comparable, but not equal, hence there is still some resentment from the community that they are being treated differently.

Indeed, in the UK at present, gay people largely get similar rights as the rest of us, but this is not true of other countries. The UK is perhaps one of the leading countries for gay rights. There may be some rights in the UK that gays do not receive, but at this stage I'm not clear about them, and cannot find anything specific. In the rest of the world, it is more of a lottery, from moderate gay rights, to countries where being LGBTQ+ is punishable by beatings, death or imprisonment, especially in Africa. Amnesty International's explanatory article is dated February 2017, and can be found here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/lgbti-lgbt-gay-human-rights-law-africa-uganda-kenya-nigeria-cameroon>. There is also a useful article on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Africa. If you are interested in the worldwide picture, the following link will give the current position: <https://76crimes.com/76-countries-where-homosexuality-is-illegal/>. It's good to see that as I write this, the total has dropped to 71 countries where homosexuality is illegal, although it is still far too high.

On slightly different tack, I sometimes wonder why we as Christians are so against the gay or lesbian on an emotional level. Yes, we point at the Bible, but it goes deeper than that, and it's not really just Christians, but societal, although that is changing – perhaps polarising as more people grow to understand the issue. Most become accepting, but a few grow more hostile. We see horrible attacks on members of the gay community, whilst, at the same time increasing enjoyment of the "Gay Pride" marches.

In early June 2019, we saw the dreadful attack on two lesbians on a late-night bus in London by a group of kids who presumably thought they'd have a laugh at someone else's expense. (See <https://metro.co.uk/2019/06/07/police-arrest-suspects-gay-couple-attacked-bus-9870237/> and <https://metro.co.uk/2019/06/08/how-can-you-even-consider-straight-pride-when-gay-women-like-me-are-being-attacked-9872111/>) The mentality is similar to the stories we looked at earlier with the mob gathering around Lot's house in Sodom and the brutal rape and death of the Levite's concubine at the end of Judges.

Why do some people hate Gays so much? That is a huge issue, and one I can't really comment on, although I suspect it is seen as a challenge to unwritten social norms, that certain unstable people feel justifies their intervention and punishment of those they see as offenders. Sadly, they don't recognise their own evil behaviour. One article I read on the issue can be found here: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/assault/roots/franklin.html>

This issue of sexuality and gender isn't just something I need to get right; it's something that the Church Universal needs to take a close look at. Indeed, there are signs that the Roman Catholic Church through Pope Francis is looking more seriously at the issue. On the 18th February 2015 Sky news reported that: "A group of gay and lesbian Catholics have been given VIP seats during an audience with the Pope for the first time – a move heralded as 'welcoming people from the outside

closer to the inside of the Church.'" It went on to comment that "Months after Pope Francis was elected, he remarked how it was impossible to judge gay people who are good-willed and seeking God. But there are no signs that the Church will change its message that gay or lesbian acts are sinful." We are still a long way from Catholic Churches welcoming 'gays', but it looks like the first small steps have been taken.

In October 2020, a documentary called, "Francesco", was released where he is shown saying:

"Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They are children of God and have a right to a family," he said.

"Nobody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it.

"What we have to create is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered."

In addition, the Irish news went on to give another illustration:

In 2018, a survivor of clerical sexual abuse had a private audience with Pope Francis.

Juan Carlos Cruz suffered at the hands of one of Chile's most notorious paedophiles.

But because he is gay, some bishops in Chile portrayed Juan as a "liar" and a "pervert".

He raised the issue with Pope Francis when they met. Afterwards, he said: "He told me, 'Juan Carlos, that you are gay does not matter. God made you like this and loves you like this and I don't care.

"The Pope loves you like this. You have to be happy with who you are."

<https://www.irishnews.com/lifestyle/faithmatters/2020/10/29/news/pope-francis-signals-respect-not-condemnation-for-gay-people-2108975/>

In June 2016 the Pulse gay nightclub in Orlando was attacked and 49 people were killed, with 59 wounded by Omar Mateen claiming allegiance with the IS terrorist organisation. He was of Afgan heritage and Muslim by faith. He claimed to hate gay people, although it was reported that it seems there may be some circumstantial evidence that he may have been gay himself. A couple of weeks after this atrocity Pope Francis made some interesting remarks. Premier Christianity website reported:

Pope Francis has told the Church to say sorry to gay and lesbian people, the poor, exploited and any others that feel marginalised by it.

Speaking on his flight home from Armenia on Sunday he said he agreed with his adviser German Cardinal Reinhard Marx who said gay people deserved an apology in the wake of the Orlando gay club attack.

The pontiff responded with a variation of his famous "Who am I to judge?" comment and a repetition of church teaching that gays must not be discriminated against but treated with respect.

He added: "Someone who has this condition, who has goodwill and is searching for God, who are we to judge? ... We must accompany them.

"I think the church must not only apologise ... to a gay person it offended, but we must apologise to the poor, to women who have been exploited, to children forced into labour, apologise for having blessed so many weapons."

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Pope-says-Church-must-apologise-to-gay-people>

Within Anglicanism, we know that having now got the 'appointing of the first female Bishop' issue resolved, the next big issue is how to deal with sexuality. This has been happening under the Sir Joseph Pilling chaired House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality, and which we mentioned earlier. The Anglican Communion is having to take a huge amount of care, because this is the issue that will, in my personal view, split the Anglican church.

In his Presidential address to General Synod in February 2014 Archbishop Justin Welby made the following comments:

"The Church of England is not tidy, nor efficiently hierarchical. There are no popes, but there is a College of Bishops and there are Synods and collections and lobbies and groups and pressure and struggle. When it works well it works because love overcomes fear. When it works badly it is because fear overcomes love. The resources for more fear lie within us and the resources for more love lie within God and are readily available to all those who in repentance and humility stretch out and seek them. With Jesus every imperative rests on an indicative, every command springs from a promise. Do not fear.

Already I can hear the arguments being pushed back at me, about compromise, about the wishy-washiness of reconciliation, to quote something I read recently. But this sort of love, and the reconciliation between differing groups that it demands and implies, is not comfortable and soft and wishy-washy. Facilitated conversations may be a clumsy phrase, but it has at its heart a search for good disagreement. It is exceptionally hard edged, extraordinarily demanding and likely to lead in parts of the world around us to profound unpopularity or dismissal.

This sort of gracious reconciliation means that we have to create safe space within ourselves to disagree, as we began to do last summer at the Synod in York, and as we need to do over the issues arising out of our discussions on sexuality, not because the outcome is predetermined to be a wishy-washy one, but because the very process is a proclamation of the Gospel of unconditionally loving God who

gives Himself for our sin and failure. It is incarnational in the best sense and leads to the need to bear our cross in the way we are commanded.

We have received a report with disagreement in it on sexuality, through the group led by Sir Joseph Pilling. There is great fear among some, here and round the world, that that will lead to the betrayal of our traditions, to the denial of the authority of scripture, to apostasy, not to use too strong a word. And there is also a great fear that our decisions will lead us to the rejection of LGBT people, to irrelevance in a changing society, to behaviour that many see akin to racism. Both those fears are alive and well in this room today.

We have to find a way forward that is one of holiness and obedience to the call of God and enables us to fulfil our purposes. This cannot be done through fear. How we go forward matters deeply, as does where we arrive."

In September 2016, in the same week we were told that a group within the Anglican communion were preparing for a split within the church (revealing plans for a shadow synod for those who wanted to hold onto traditional church values – depends on what constitutes 'traditional', I guess!) we were told that the Bishop of Grantham had revealed that he is gay and in a celibate relationship. He becomes the first Church of England bishop to publicly come out. In his comment, Nicholas Chamberlain said he is in a long-term relationship with his male partner, but he is following Church rules and they do not sleep together. This caused a bit of a furore, initially, but now seems to have slipped into the background.

However, for me, may Justin Welby's call for "good disagreement" on these issues work out. May he and his bishops have the wisdom of Solomon, and the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding their thinking.

Anglican thinking has recently been clarified with the release of their 425+ page document, called "Living in Faith & Love" and you can access their resources here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>. I haven't had time to read it and as it is even longer than this document, it may take a while!

The Baptist Union still takes an anti-gay stance, but clearly leaves it to individual churches and fellowships to come to their own conclusion. This is a slightly different stance because each church is autonomous in any case, so no directives from on high can or should filter down. It is a Union of Baptist churches sharing things they hold in common. Nevertheless, clearly, they recognise the ground is shakier, if they no longer ask all churches to adhere to the previous position. The Declaration of Principle for the Baptist Union states:

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.

2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'.

3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

Indeed, following the introduction of The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, in response to registering buildings for Same-sex Marriage their position is:

Reflecting on the issue of churches registering their buildings for same sex marriage, Council recognises areas of genuine and deep disagreement. We believe that these are dimensions of the tension of living with unity and diversity. We continue to seek God's grace as we 'walk together and watch over one another' under the authority of Christ.

*In the light of this, recognising the costs involved and after careful and prayerful reflection and listening, we humbly **urge churches who are considering conducting same-sex marriages to refrain from doing so out of mutual respect.** At the same time, we also humbly urge all churches to remain committed to our Union out of mutual respect; trusting that the one who unites us is stronger than what divides us.*

In other words, "Don't do anything to rock our comfortable boat". I'm left somewhat uncomfortable with that because the affirming part of the body of Christ wants to move forward and express the Grace of Christ to a hurting section of society but are being asked to hold back for the sake of the church. It's very similar to the Anglican situation, because the non-affirming section of the church holds the power to drag its feet for as long as it wants, with no requirement for it to compromise or find middle ground. This type of compromise is only on one side, and that can never work where there is no end date. It is a blocking motion dressed up as "restraint, out of mutual respect". One side is the prisoner of the other.

However, in the Name of Jesus, both sides of the church **must** find a way to work together, although practically that might mean that people may leave one church to join another that is more akin to their understanding. It is sad when that happens, but sometimes it may be a necessary, least bad option. There is not much wiggle room to find a middle way in a church where some would welcome a gay pastor, and others wouldn't even allow a gay person to hand out the hymn books. I don't like the idea of changing churches, but I have had to do it myself. There will be some necessary shuffling around, but when the dust settles, each church must work with all those other churches around them, whatever their stance - to the glory of God.

Some will see these trends and complain bitterly that I, in this instance, and more importantly, others like Steve Chalke and Tony Campolo, are compromising with the world, and society, and therefore the Devil, and we need to remain true to the Bible. Personally, I would argue that “Yes, I continually strive to remain true to the Bible. I don’t much care what the world thinks, but I want God to be pleased with the integrity of my position”.

As I look to enter the final straight of my writings, and in thinking about this whole issue, I am left to ponder that if the problem of being LGBTQ+TS (etc.) was as important an issue for God as it is for His church, why did he not make sure that the Bible writers got their language absolutely right, with no misunderstandings possible. After all we have no misunderstandings about many sins: Adultery; rage; killing; theft; idolatry; greed, etc., yet here, with our treatment of a group of people, we work hard and struggle to make the words of the Bible seem to ostracise them, with no real explanation why. I believe it is incumbent on those who believe LGBTQ+ folks are wrong, to stop giving waffly answers, and give **proper** reasons why, and these must go beyond the tired “the Bible says so”, or “appealing to 2000 years of history” – which is actually historically wrong. I have spent many, many pages explaining from scripture why I believe they should be embraced. If you take an opposing view, you need to put in the same effort and “show your workings”. Don’t forget to explain how Grace works within the non-affirming context, and also include your interpretation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 11 to his disciples, which include LGBTQ+ Christians, where he says:

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

When Paul was writing he was writing to a group of people in a particular place, at a particular time. He used words, themes, and word-plays he knew they would understand and appreciate. If he were writing knowing that what he was saying would be used 2,000 years later across every country and culture, I’m sure he would have written in a very different style, with explanatory notes. If I wrote to someone at a previous church I had been part of, I might refer to things going on there which we both knew about, so I wouldn’t need to say much but simply allude to a situation and we’d both know what I was referring to. However, anyone from my current church reading my letter, might try and guess what I had been addressing, but may well be very wide of the mark, because they hadn’t been there, and anyone who has never met me, wouldn’t have a clue. Paul was an extremely competent, intelligent, and educated man. If he were truly against being gay or lesbian, he could have used clear and unambiguous words; words that were in common usage at the time, not words he had as good as “made up” (arsenokoitai) and used only once or twice. In his essay “Is Gay Prejudice Taught In The Bible?” Richard Wayne Garganta refers to Professor John E Boswell a historian at Yale University studying the issue of religion and homosexuality (specifically Christianity and homosexuality). He tells us that, according to Professor Boswell,

“there was another word used in the Greek language of Paul's time for a person naturally oriented toward homosexuality. That word is arrenokoites. It differs from arsenokoites only in its third letter. But arrenokoites is never used in the Scriptures.”

See <http://gayprejudice.com/GayPrejudice.pdf>

I need to interject something here: Rev Bruce W Lowe in his “Letter to Louise”, (which we’ll come back to again shortly, and I’ve provided a link in the “Additional Resources” section at the end), writes:

“There are at least five Greek words that specifically mean people who practice same-gender sex. Unquestionably, if Paul had meant such people, he would not have used a word that is never used to mean that in Greek writings when he had other words that were clear in that meaning.”

Please read Rev Bruce Lowe’s letter, as it includes points I haven’t mentioned. I provide links to it later.

So, to base a theology against a group of people, on such flimsy word-usage, where it could mean this or that, where far clearer language was readily available, is irresponsible, particularly when so many people are wounded and killed in the name of Jesus – the person who is the definition of love.

In addition, I would make the point that all the ‘clobber’ passages use negative language: the passages say we shouldn’t do x., y..., or z. If Homosexuality was really the evil folks claim, why didn’t the Bible take a much more simplistic line and say that sex can only be performed between an unrelated man and woman (and you can extend that to say “within a consensual and monogamous relationship”) and all other forms of sex are sinful. If you provide a list of people and situations in which a physical relationship is forbidden, it is natural to look for any loopholes – and we all do it, including both you and me. I bet you have been looking for weaknesses and loopholes in what I have written!

Clearly even that simplistic line is far from perfect, because as we saw, there are lots of Biblical characters with more than one wife, Abraham, David and Solomon for starters, and God blessed them mightily. Then you have Hosea marrying a prostitute at God’s command, and taking her back after she leaves him for another man, which seems to be in contravention to God’s (or was it just Moses’?) Law laid out in Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

*¹ If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ² and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her first husband, who divorced her, is **not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled**. That would be detestable in the eyes of*

the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Don't say that Hosea didn't divorce her, so she was still married to him – that's a cop-out. In Biblical parlance, Hosea's wife ended her marriage, and then "became one" in God's eyes with her new partner. You can then look at how "marriages" are treated in the Bible and instead of being sacrosanct; they can be broken without thought of the cost to the women and children. Nehemiah, who was part of the vanguard of the Israelites returning from exile got pretty mad when he found that those who had been left behind when the exile took place, had taken wives, (and presumably husbands) from the surrounding tribes. To our minds Nehemiah behaved disgracefully, but he is held in high esteem because of his fervour for God. In chapter 13: 23-27 we read:

²³ Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. ²⁴ Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.

²⁵ **I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of them and pulled out their hair.** I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. ²⁷ Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"

What Would Jesus Do? I doubt he would have "rebuked them and called curses down on them", beating some of them and pulling out their hair. I doubt he would have sought to break the marriages. In fact, I know he wouldn't, and neither would Paul, because he writes about those with non-believing partners saying:

¹² *To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

(1 Corinthians 7: 12-14)

I have some sympathy for the remnant, because from their perspective, they would have seen a catastrophe occur, their God seemingly powerless, and themselves being such a small and poor community. With God seemingly absent or irrelevant (again from their perspective), they would have looked at their neighbouring tribes with whom they would have been trading and created relationships that were good

for both families. Of course, we could argue with the benefit of hindsight that God didn't want them to do this, and they should have sought to retain their Jewishness, but when other members of your family and friends have been horribly killed, or taken away with hooks through their noses, uncertain if they'll ever be seen alive again, you won't be feeling particularly like worshipping God. Besides, food is likely to be scarce. Has God come through for you? It's easy to sit at 2000 years' distance with the full revelation of God to hand, and criticise, saying God warned them enough times! If our experience of faith was like theirs – and with no Holy Spirit to prompt and refresh and only obeying laws with no real proof that God was at work – except rare interventions, how different would we be? I would love to think I would have remained righteous, but I have my doubts.

Before we got side-tracked with Hosea and Nehemiah, we were asking about how we define relationships that pleased God. As we have found, the "acceptable" relationship is hard to define, because you can have such fun looking for those exceptions whom God has clearly blessed! The Bible doesn't give that absolute clarity of a positive rule, and instead leaves lots of ambiguous passages, which may mean one thing, or it may mean another, so what do we make of that?

We say the Bible is God's inerrant and final word, but these issues and debates about meanings have inevitably softened my grip – and I certainly don't regard the Bible as being without factual error.

Don't misunderstand that comment. It is still God inspired and teaches us about Him, although we can definitely say that not every word and comma has been God-dictated (in the relevant language of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), but I believe the underlying theme and message, very much coming from God's mind and heart.

The origins of the Bible were of a human, oral tradition, which was later written down and there are various manuscripts, that largely corroborate but sometimes differ in content, which is why some footnotes talk about "Septuagint and Vulgate say ... but other manuscripts say ..." Sometimes the Bible Scholars opt for one manuscript and sometimes another. I have already pointed out many problems with the text of the Bible but I need to give you a further example or two. John 5: 39 starts with: "*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life.*" There is a footnote in most Bibles to say that there is an alternative rendering to "You study..." and instead it reads simply as, "Study...", making it a command instead of an observation. Other Translations use "You search...", with the alternative rendering of, "Search..." If you believe every word, comma, full stop is God-breathed, which version did he breathe, and in which language – it certainly wasn't English! In addition, there are no existing original copies the Gospels, or indeed, of Paul's letters. They are all copies, transcribed by later writers. There are thousands of these documents, and none of them are carbon-copies of any of the others. (Read Bart D. Ehrman, *Whose Word is it?* Bloomsbury Publishing Plc in UK and a.k.a. in the USA: *Misquoting Jesus*. HarperCollins). Earlier, in that same chapter of John, Jesus is healing a man at the pool of Bethesda and in some versions, verse 4 (where we are told an angel

sometime stirred the pool, and this was the signal to jump in) is included and in others it is left out as it might be unreliable. In 1Thessalonians 4, Paul writes:

*³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should **learn to control your own body** in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;*

That phrase “learn to control your own body” has a footnote to say that there are two other possible renderings “learn to live with your own wife” or “learn to acquire a wife”. Although the most likely rendering has been used, as we have said many times, the fact that there are alternatives presents a problem to those who adhere to the view that every word is ‘God-breathed’ – but those, like myself, who look at the underlying message rather than the words used, will have no problem at all. Any of those interpretations are consistent with God’s Word. Learning to live with your own wife, implies that there are problems with the relationship that need working on, but that’s a different concept than controlling your own body. Either meaning is consistent with God’s Word, as we said.

There are hundreds of such examples in the Bible. I keep repeating myself, but, can we be sure that we have got the God-breathed bits right every time? If your theology is based strictly on word accuracy, you have a massive problem, if it is based on the ideas being taught, there is no problem at all. If I have sown doubts in your mind, those doubts should be in the way you have learned to read the Bible, not in the **message** of the Bible. Jesus said that whoever has seen Him, has seen the Father as well (See John 14:9.), so if you are struggling, don’t lose that picture of Jesus in your mind as you read the Scriptures. Throughout my writing, I have referred to several authors who have helped me enormously as I have learned to change the way I read the Bible, and I single out, and thank, Peter Enns as particularly helpful.

Some themes are not hard to understand, because they are repeated throughout the Bible, for example the theme of social justice and helping the oppressed (repeated many, many times in the Old Testament when God sent his prophets to warn of his Judgement prior to the exile). Here are just two key passages, but you could have looked at Amos 5:15, 21-24; Isaiah 1:17; Isaiah 5:7; Jeremiah 5:28; and many others, including many of the Laws of Moses:

*Micah 6: ⁶ With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ **He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.***

Luke 11: ⁴⁶ Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

Those two passages are so significant: in the Micah passage we realise we can't justify ourselves by all the things we've given God—He doesn't care about them—God just wants our spirits to be right with Him. And Jesus Himself, in the second, challenges us directly, because we tell people what **we think** they should do, and provide no help, love or concern.

Having taken a slight detour there, let's return to my comments about my confidence in the Bible. I believe we need to use the intent, themes and spirit of the **whole** Bible to gain a big picture, and from there you can zoom in to get the detail. In fact, I think we need to continually zoom in and out, to make sure that what we see, is consistent at both the micro and macro level. The true message of the Bible will be consistent at both levels. For me to turn my back on the LGBTQ+ person in the micro level contradicts much of the Bible at the macro level, and by now you won't need me to point out those passages, because you'll know. So, if something is right, in either the macro or micro level, it will be right in the other and if it is wrong, it will be wrong in both. God's Word means that I try to live my life according to His guidance from that Word. However, unfortunately we all fail – every last one of us.

As we have already seen, Paul, in concert with most of the rest of Scripture, highlights the inability of Law to deal with any moral problem, so I would want to ask how we as a church (universal) hope to win gays/lesbians to the church, when we adopt a "whack-a-mole" attitude towards them. How do you show the love of Jesus, when your attitude is completely opposite? I have two final quotes from Philip Yancey's "What's so amazing about Grace?" In the first, Philip writes about the limits of state legislation to achieve much, saying:

"A state government can shut down stores and theatres on Sunday, but it cannot compel worship. ... It can pass laws making divorce more difficult, but cannot force husbands to love their wives, and wives, their husbands. It can give subsidies to the poor, but cannot force the rich to show them compassion and justice. It can ban adultery but not lust, theft but not covetousness, cheating but not pride. It can encourage virtue, but not holiness".

Do we as a church not learn from our own teachings that driving people out, barring them by national/local church legislation, is only going to be counter-productive – we will effectively build up walls around us that will keep the 'nasty people' out, but at what cost? We are already bemoaning the diminution of our liberties, and if society just sees us as an isolated and irrelevant self-interest group refusing to engage with the problems of society, we'll lose a lot more! In addition, with LGBTQ+ folks out there suffering rejection, they'll be talking in negative terms about the church with their own friends who may not necessarily be gay, and the church will be lost to them as well. If you exclude someone who is Christian but

also LGBTQ+ from a church, how is that person's faith going to develop outside a church. Aren't they much more likely to develop heretical ideas, when there is no one available to guide or challenge their thinking? Your actions have consequences.

In the other passage from Philip Yancey, he writes:

In a scene from the movie 'Ironweed', the characters played by Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep stumble across an old Eskimo woman lying in the snow, probably drunk. Besotted themselves, the two debate what they should do about her.

"Is she a drunk or a bum?" asks Nicholson.

"Just a bum. Been one all her life"

"And before that"

"She was a whore in Alaska."

"She hasn't been a whore all her life. Before that?"

"I dunno. Just a little kid I guess"

"Well a little kid's something. It's not a bum and it's not a whore. It's something. Let's take her in."

The two vagrants were seeing the woman through the lens of grace. Where society saw only a bum and a whore, grace saw "a little kid," a person made in the image of God, no matter how defaced that image had become.

I believe the church has to demonstrate this same grace towards the LGBTQ+ community, after all we are the people who are supposed to be most experienced and motivated in the use of grace! Too often however, we are blinded by what is in front of us, and our innate prejudice, and fail to look at the person with the same eyes that Jesus uses.

At present, it is so hard for LGBTQ+ folk to feel a part of an established church, because of rejection by those already in the church, or the fear of rejection. We push these folk out of our churches so either they are forced to set up churches for themselves, or they are lost to Jesus completely. It's sad we can't all meet together and share our diversity, but we all like the comfort of our traditions, and as LGBTQ+ folk have only recently become recognised, we find them uncomfortable and don't want them changing things.

Getting back to Scripture, you can look at what God says in both the big picture and small, and by the prompting of His Spirit, determine how to live your life. Nevertheless, let's say you are a gay or lesbian or any other person on that spectrum, and we assume that in God's eyes your activities seem by many to condemn you to eternal separation from Jesus; why would the Bible be so hazy about it? We only have 7-8 passages in Scripture that can be used to clobber the LGBTQ+ community, and as we have seen, there are serious and very valid

questions about each of them. God knows everything. He knew there would be this issue. He knew language changes over the course of time. As we have already said, He knows that we as humans would look for loopholes, so if the issue were a show-stopper, why did he not ensure the text was irrefutable in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek? It wouldn't have been hard! The absence of this, along with the strength of the arguments against each passage, leads me to conclude that from Scripture, we shouldn't have a problem, and we should welcome and encourage these folks in, and into, our fellowships, showing them the same grace God and Jesus offer us.

As Evangelicals, we love talking about the Grace of God and that we are no longer bound by the Law, but then we use that same Law to bash gays. Isn't that a bit bizarre? Why is that?

Let me reiterate, the Grace of God is as available to the gay or lesbian as it is to the straight. Whoever believes! No conditions. It cost God everything, it costs me nothing! We have no right to use the Law to 'bind' the LGBTQ+ community, when we proclaim that we are no longer bound by that same Law.

I have heard Christians rationalise it by saying that "we are trying to live a life fully focussed on God and His Spirit, but the LGBTQ+ person carries on living as before, unchanged by God's Spirit". However, we look at one single aspect of their life that is as likely to change as the colour of their eyes, and never get close enough to see the great work the Spirit has already done in that person's life. We choose to forget the gossip, judgmentalism and hurtful remarks **we** make on a regular basis, and don't see the sin we commit. Specks and planks! Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

Andrew Marin paints a picture many of us can relate to:

I believed I knew gays and lesbians very well because I saw them on TV, I saw the cross-dressing pictures of them at the Pride Parades and I heard "the" rumors. They were too flamboyant and hated everything I loved. I was able to succinctly rationalize myself and my actions without ever thinking twice about what I believed or said because I was convinced the GLBT community was exactly the same in real life as they were in my mind.

I didn't know one person in that community. Not one! Neither did I know anyone who was dealing with an unwanted same-sex attraction, and that was fine with me. Don't ask, don't tell. Don't see, don't care. Out of sight, out of mind. Those philosophies worked well. I didn't understand them and never one time did it cross my mind to actually reach out and make any effort to try. I just didn't care enough to do that.

Looking back on those years I never remembered hearing anything defaming gays and lesbians from either my church or my parents. But that didn't matter because I read the Bible and I knew what it said. It's

a sin. They have chosen to be like that and they can stop their behaviours whenever they want to, so it's their fault for what happens. Besides, the thought of gay sex grossed me out. I just knew enough at the time to know that my beliefs were right. Case closed.

However, Andrew now leads a non-profit organization that seeks to build bridges between the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) and religious communities. Why change? And how did it happen? You can read his story here:

<http://208.106.253.109/essays/project-love-restoring-a-bridge-with-the-gay-community.aspx>

On the pages of <http://geekyjustin.com/great-debate/> an argument is put forward referring to the time when Jesus and his disciples were walking through the cornfield and the Disciples were picking corn. The Pharisees accuse the disciples of breaking the law, but Jesus turns the tables and ...

... implicitly accepts the Pharisees' contention that he's violating the Sabbath law, but then he makes the argument that sometimes it's okay to violate the letter of the law!

To make his case, Jesus gives them the example of David, who ate consecrated bread when he had no food, even though only priests were allowed to eat consecrated bread (Matt. 12: 3-4). He also points out that their own common sense would tell them to save a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, even though that would clearly be work (Matt. 12: 11 -1 2).

In verse 7, Jesus quotes a scripture to back himself up: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Remember that line? Notice, Jesus is building on a principle here that he expects the religious leaders to already know. This passage isn't just about the Sabbath; it's about the law in general and how Jesus expects us to read the Scriptures.

But if Jesus is telling us that we're allowed to break the rules sometimes, what does that mean? Is God getting soft on sin, becoming mellow as the years go on? Well, of course not. God detests sin and cannot have anything to do with it. But God also knows, in His infinite wisdom, that mere rules and regulations are not always sufficient to define what is sinful. The specifics of the situation make a huge difference.

Let's use an example we can all relate to. Maybe you are a driver who has been caught speeding. Most drivers would prefer to be stopped by the police rather than caught on camera, because we know a camera simply sees things in a figurative 'black and white': speeding/not speeding. A policeman may be feeling

charitable, and simply decides to tell you off and let you go after a finger wagging – if you get lucky (or he may do a thorough check and nick you for that defective tyre on your spare wheel, or an ineffective windscreen wiper, or slightly frayed seat belt, if you are unlucky!)

On the other hand, you may have been speeding to get to a hospital in an emergency, because a life is at risk, or your wife is about to give birth and complications have arisen. The speed camera cannot discern the reason and you might then have the hassle of trying to appeal the conviction.

But Jesus fulfilled the law, meaning that it is the heart and motive of the situation that is important and much less the action itself. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus teaches us to look at the reasons for each and every law, and that there are times we must show mercy. It is this thinking that has largely directed my thinking and theology, so I regard it as hugely important. If you want another example, you can look at the woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus to test him, as recorded in John 8: 1-11. Adultery is always portrayed as bad, and it appears in several of the vice lists we looked at earlier. Indeed, Jesus listed “Do not commit adultery”, as one of the most important commandments to adhere to in his discussion with the Rich Young Man in Matthew 19: 17-19, but when faced with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus offered mercy, the sticklers for the rules went away with their tails between their legs and Jesus asked her to ‘sin no more’. So, what do you make of this contradiction Jesus himself offers: in one place, it’s a key commandment, but then in another, Jesus sets it aside? Although there is some doubt about whether this passage was ever written by John, it expresses words that are entirely consistent with the Lord’s teaching. Incidentally, when adultery comes up, the church today almost has an attitude of “And...? Your problem is...?” before shrugging its shoulders, and yet jumps up and down with rage where LGBTQ+ folk ask to be loved and respected. Hypocritical, isn’t it?

As for the woman caught in adultery in the passage, the important thing here is that mercy was offered, but I can hear too many Christian friends clamouring to say, “but look, he told the woman to ‘go away and sin no more’. So therefore, the LGBTQ+ person is forgiven, but they aren’t allowed to repeat their sin”. They totally miss the point of grace and mercy because they are still wielding the law like a club and battering the victim with it. The difference is blindingly obvious. The woman wasn’t prevented from expressing her heterosexual nature, but it now had to be within the normal legal parameters of marriage. In any case, for most people, adultery doesn’t normally happen that often, and if a shot is put across the bows early enough, you quickly learn, and stop it happening. The non-affirming Christian therefore accepts the woman caught in adultery can continue to have relations with a man providing it is within a legal context but wants the person who is by very nature and orientation, lesbian/gay, to be celibate, or alternatively go against his/her orientation (their created order) and take a spouse of the opposite sex, and we’ve already dealt with that – many times!

There is an additional point here that I believe needs pointing out: Because Jesus was without sin, and he had said *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,"* He **could** have thrown the first rock at the woman. However, having asked her to repent of her sin, he showed no condemnation of the woman, and instead, chose mercy and grace. Would he be the first to 'stone' someone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community? Of course not, so, why should we?

A page or so back, Justin Lee quoted some verses from Matthew 12. I want to add another one here while we are talking about mercy and grace. Verse 20 of that chapter reads:

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory."

Given the kicking much of the Church gives to members of the LGBTQ+ community, this verse should be a challenge and an example of the attitude we need to reflect, if we claim we truly follow Jesus.

While we have been talking about adultery for a bit, let me return and make a few more comments. Just now, I mentioned the church is a bit soft towards adultery. What does the Bible mean when it talks about *Adultery*?

In the Bible, it referred to someone who had illicit intercourse with someone who was either married or betrothed. Both parties would be regarded as guilty. If a married man has intercourse with an unmarried woman, it was regarded as fornication, which again was wrong.

The penalty for adultery was death (for both parties), and this is repeated many times:

- Exodus 20: 14 "You shall not commit adultery."
- Leviticus 18: 20 "Do not have sexual relations with your neighbour's wife and defile yourself with her."
- Leviticus 20: 10 "'If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbour—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death."
- Leviticus 21: 9 "'If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire." How does this law get interpreted in today's church? Maybe if we read the Bible as an Evangelical Christian we would have to say that the daughter of a Pastor would be thrown in the fire if she became a prostitute. Or in view of our belief in the "Priesthood of all Believers" the daughter of any church member would be thrown in the fire if she became a prostitute. Okay, this situation doesn't happen often, but I can still hear the rush to find escape clauses! We would appeal to God's mercy and grace, quite correctly, but we make no effort to apply that same grace to the LGBTQ+ Community.
- Deuteronomy 5: 18 "You shall not commit adultery."

- Deuteronomy 22: 22 “If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.”

Those are just a few passages about adultery that are equivalent to the so-called “clobber” passages, so if we wanted to make a case that adultery wasn’t really a sin we would have to ask:

- “What DID those verses mean when they were written?”
- “What did the writer intend to convey to his readers/hearers?”
- “Does the New Testament have anything to say?” and “Is the message consistent with what we read in the Old Testament”

The difference here is that the New Testament is utterly clear, with no ambiguity or question, regarding adultery. Take a look at: Matthew 5: 27-32; Matthew 15: 19; Matthew 19: 9 & 18; Mark 10: 11, 12 & 19; Luke 16: 18; Luke 18: 20; John 8: 3-5 (which we’ve been looking at). There will be other related passages as this list is far from exhaustive.

At the same time as saying the Bible is clear about the punishment for adultery, I must point out that it seems it can also be flexible (we’ve already seen Jesus’s attitude for mercy and grace) and somewhat strange. In Numbers 5 we have a strange passage. It relates to a situation where a husband suspects his wife has been unfaithful - but has no proof. (Sadly, the Bible has no corresponding passage where the wife thinks her husband has been unfaithful! This is another problem for those who take the Bible literally.) From verse 11 we read about the Test for the Unfaithful Wife:

¹¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹² “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If a man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him ¹³ so that another man has sexual relations with her, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act), ¹⁴ and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure—or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure— ¹⁵ then he is to take his wife to the priest. He must also take an offering of a tenth of an ephah of barley flour on her behalf. He must not pour olive oil on it or put incense on it, because it is a grain offering for jealousy, a reminder-offering to draw attention to wrongdoing.

¹⁶ “The priest shall bring her and have her stand before the Lord. ¹⁷ Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water. ¹⁸ After the priest has had the woman stand before the Lord, he shall loosen her hair and place in her hands the reminder-offering, the grain offering for jealousy, while he himself holds the bitter water that brings a curse. ¹⁹ Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, “If no other man has had sexual relations with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water

that brings a curse not harm you. ²⁰ But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have made yourself impure by having sexual relations with a man other than your husband”— ²¹ here the priest is to put the woman under this curse—“ may the Lord cause you to become a curse among your people when he makes your womb miscarry and your abdomen swell. ²² May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells or your womb miscarries.”

“Then the woman is to say, “Amen. So be it.”

²³ “The priest is to write these curses on a scroll and then wash them off into the bitter water. ²⁴ He shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and this water that brings a curse and causes bitter suffering will enter her. ²⁵ The priest is to take from her hands the grain offering for jealousy, wave it before the Lord and bring it to the altar. ²⁶ The priest is then to take a handful of the grain offering as a memorial[e] offering and burn it on the altar; after that, he is to have the woman drink the water. ²⁷ If she has made herself impure and been unfaithful to her husband, this will be the result: When she is made to drink the water that brings a curse and causes bitter suffering, it will enter her, her abdomen will swell and her womb will miscarry, and she will become a curse. ²⁸ If, however, the woman has not made herself impure, but is clean, she will be cleared of guilt and will be able to have children.

²⁹ “This, then, is the law of jealousy when a woman goes astray and makes herself impure while married to her husband, ³⁰ or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to have her stand before the Lord and is to apply this entire law to her.

³¹ The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing, but the woman will bear the consequences of her sin.”

In reading around this story, it appears there is no record that this law was ever invoked, which makes you wonder why it is included. I included this passage because there is no reference to stoning the woman as the punishment – simply that she will become a curse, not that that was a good thing! It appears life would continue even if there was the taint of adultery hanging on her.

I would suggest that the Bible is flexible in many situations, so that if we have the Spirit of God in us, we can determine what is appropriate in the situation. If we see the Bible as a rigid and inflexible rulebook, we must perform many mental and spiritual gymnastics to work our way through passages that clearly contradict one another. Before I move on, I need to add one more thing: In the Bible, idolatry, covetousness, and apostasy are spoken of as [spiritual] adultery. So, just as the sin of adultery was punishable by death, it follows that for our own guilt of idolatry we

deserve to die, but Jesus died for us and forgave us for everything that offends God.

We've just read the story from John 8 about the woman caught in adultery, but I want to draw attention to one from John 4 (verses 1-42). When Jesus visits a town called Sychar in Samaria he chats with a woman at the well, asking her to give him a drink. We learn from the dialogue that she has been married 5 times and she is now co-habiting with another man. Although Jesus is recorded as clearly describing her situation, at no point in the text is he reported as condemning her behaviour, and in fact through her evangelism, many Samaritans believed in Him. There is no record of Jesus calling her to repent, or indeed of her repenting (in contrast to the previous story of the woman caught in adultery). You could argue it is implicit, but that would be to read more into the text than is provided, and that is dangerous. Her actions of rushing to the village, aren't as a result of repentance but of excitement that possibly the Messiah has just been speaking to her!

We must be very careful indeed when we condemn others, because, as we have said earlier, we all remain sinful, and keep having to return to God in repentance. Paul writes in Romans 2:

*³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do **you show contempt for the riches of his kindness**, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? (NIV)*

Or:

*³ So when you, O man, pass judgment on others, yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or **do you disregard the riches of His kindness**, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance? (Berean Study Bible)*

God is kind towards those who seek Him. He doesn't seek to condemn them but to draw them close, so they can receive His blessing, mercy, and grace. He is less kind to those who oppose His Kingdom principles.

I believe Paul goes some way to recognising the problem we have with law, and after all the work he did, writing about the issue in Romans, he comes back to it in his letter to the Hebrews. He refers to the Old Covenant made with Moses, explaining how it fails. Indeed, no-one was saved by keeping the law, which is a bit of a problem if the ultimate point was to save people! Instead, Paul explains that the replacement had to be radically different and achievable. He quotes Jeremiah (31: 31-34) telling us that the New Covenant will be written on our hearts and minds, and that the Old Covenant is completely obsolete. Paul writes in **Hebrews 8: 6-13**: -

⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said:

*'The days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.*

⁹ *It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,
and I turned away from them,
declares the Lord.*

¹⁰ *This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.*

***I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.***

***I will be their God,
and they will be my people.***

¹¹ *No longer will they teach their neighbours,
or say to one another, "Know the Lord,"
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.*

¹² ***For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.'***

¹³ ***By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete;
and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.***

I'm sure there will be those observing that because God is Omniscient (He knows everything) what was the point of the Old Covenant, because He knew it'd fail – He knew it wasn't very good, so why be associated with failure. That's for another day, but it is this obsolete law we like to hang our theology on. We love rules to guide us, because if we don't have rules, anything is possible. Yes, anything *is* possible if the Holy Spirit is allowed to be actively involved. He can be a restraining influence as well an encouraging one. The law is still left in our Bibles, not to cling on to, but to show that it is unattainable in its fullness. Even though we know we can't attain salvation by Law, we still insist on trying to see how much of it we can keep, in spite of God saying, "take your eyes off that, and look at my Son." I hope you also find that this promise from Jeremiah, is a liberating and exciting passage.

Let's assume you are not persuaded by these arguments. These are largely based on the Law – what we are, and what we are not permitted to do. Instead, as I've just been mentioning, I believe we should be appealing to Grace, something that costs God everything, and offer that Grace to people who in their own and society's, eyes don't deserve anything. LGBT+ folks are looking for grace, in the same way as I do, in the same way as I hope you do. We shouldn't be looking for ways to exclude them but looking for ways we can include them. In Jesus' day lepers were cast to the fringes of society, today, the gay, lesbian and Trans have been pushed there by the church. We need to redeem them and bring them back into the church by showing them grace. Please excuse a little bit of passion and possibly emotion, but the tens, and hundreds of thousands of folk who have been convicted for being gay, both here in the UK and across the world, need to have their sentences quashed, nullified, rescinded or pardoned – set to nought.

Since originally writing that previous sentence in 2015, this has started to happen in several countries: Germany announced in May 2016 that it would annul the convictions of close to 50,000 men, sentenced between 1946 and 1969. In the UK, some 65,000 men were convicted under now-repealed indecency laws and 15,000 of them are still alive. Since October 2012, men convicted under the UK's previous homosexuality laws have been allowed to request their convictions be disregarded, meaning the convictions do not appear on their criminal records - providing their conviction would not be regarded as a crime today. As from October 2016 posthumous pardons will be granted to people convicted of historical sexual offences who would be innocent of any crime today.

However, that sounds like everything is rosy, and it isn't – by a long chalk. Whilst everything just written, to my knowledge, is factually correct, the devil is in the detail.

In 2012, as part of the Protection of Freedoms Act for England and Wales, there was a scheme included to "Disregard" some historic homosexual offences, but this only really covered things like "gross indecency" and "buggery".

Then in 2017, the possibility of receiving a Pardon came in, under what was called the "Alan Turing Law", and opened up possibility of being pardoned for the offences mentioned above. However, the pardon only applied to men who have successfully applied to the Home Office for their conviction to be "disregarded", so it was fairly ineffectual, and didn't cover the vast majority of gay people who had been convicted of same-sex activity. So, if you had been convicted of "soliciting" (an offence repealed in 2003) or "importuning" (which might have simply been chatting someone up in a public toilet), because these were regarded as sex-crimes, they were excluded from any pardon. Indeed, any conviction in or around public toilets were specifically excluded from pardons, because sexual activity in any public toilet is still included. However, men were being arrested on many occasions without any form of sexual activity actually taking place. By way of additional background, historically Police could raid any home, and charge any man having same-sex relations providing it wasn't a detached house (presumably

because sound in any other dwelling could permeate the walls to neighbours). So, gays were not safe anywhere, even in their own homes (whether terraced, semis or flats). So, frequently, police in plain clothes would hide in public toilets, to trap suspected gay men hoping for sex. There are many stories of men being arrested as soon as they spoke to another man in or near a public toilet, whether it was sex-related or not. Police during this period acted quite shamefully in their persecution of the gay community, and the subsequent pardoning legislation results in a complete lottery of who is pardoned and whose conviction remains for life, as with real sex-offenders.

So, a man historically caught and charged in one part of town might today be pardoned, whilst another caught and charged on the same day, with an identical offence, but by a different officer will not, because the officer used a different law. A portion of the information for these three or four paragraphs came from the Podcast "The Log Books", episode 4, "Pretty Policemen" (www.thelogbooks.org). Additionally they quote the statistic that there were 50,000 convictions recorded on the England and Wales Police national database, of which, the Government indicate that 16,000 people were eligible for "Disregards"(and later, Pardons), and as of March 2019 only 186 "Disregards" had been granted, which is shocking. There is still something quite offensive under God going on, and I hope you find that as offensive as I.

I don't normally commend the Scottish Government, but I did in early November 2017 when they issued a public apology to gay men persecuted and humiliated during the period that homosexuality was regarded as a crime in Scotland. An automatic pardon will be issued to any gay man convicted of same-sex sexual activity, before it was decriminalized in 1981.

In addition, there are a small group of people who consider themselves neither male or female – they are non-gendered. Because they do not identify as male or female, they want to have their gender recognised on Passports as 'X'. Currently the UK are not prepared to offer this, although several other countries issue genderless passports. See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44575229>



Nick Duffy and husband Phil Duffy show exactly what the pardon means to them. Their story can be found here: <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/11/08/man-prosecuted-for-being-gay-breaks-down-as-nicola-sturgeon-apologises/>

The nullification of convictions and issue of genderless passports are equally issues that Christians should be fighting for, both here in the UK and across the world. I would also want to involve the church in that sentence, because they have their own rules and legislation, for which they need to apologise. The word church

doesn't mean Anglican, or Baptist, or ..., but every denomination, and small local church, because each have their own set of rules by which they keep LGBT+ folk at a distance. However, it's so difficult to do that if you are an isolated single Christian, holding affirming views, when so many of our brothers and sisters hate lesbians and gays so profoundly, even if it is couched in what they think is 'loving' language. There is little difference between a Muslim fundamentalist killing people in the name of the prophet, and the Christian fundamentalist who would like to pretend or wish gays or lesbians don't exist – actively rejecting and excluding them from fellowship and friendship with other Christians. May God forgive the utter shame of their (occasional) invective language directed towards our gay or lesbian friends, and bless them, despite their inability to understand the magnificent grace that God offers.

Under the "Black Lives Matter" campaign it was been argued that to simply say nothing is not acceptable – "It's not enough to be "not Racist", you must be "Anti-Racist", "Silence breeds Violence" and "White Silence costs Black Lives" were two banners. And that is probably true, if you say nothing when folks are physically or verbally attacked, it gives tacit permission and agreement that you stand with the attack. Remember Saul looking after the coats while Stephen was stoned. (Acts 7:58) Silence may speak louder than words, but do you know what it is saying? This is also true within the LGBTQ+ theological situation. If you say nothing, how long will the injustice last.

Before we completely wrap up the essay, let's say that all I have written so far is utter tosh, and that those who argue that the clobber passages are right with their comments that God is against the gay or lesbian. I know I repeatedly ask this question, but once again, "Why?" Why is consensual monogamous homosexuality a sin? I believe those arguing in favour of rejecting the gay or lesbian, MUST have a clear and well-reasoned argument, which goes beyond the ill-informed "The Bible/God says it's wrong" line. You should understand the Biblical principle of why something is wrong. Why is it wrong to kill, to steal, to hurt children, to take your neighbours wife (all those are obvious), to move boundary stones (stealing a neighbours land), to make clothes from mixed fibres (shrink at different rates!), to put new wine in old wineskins (they've already stretched, so they'll burst if used again), not to put a railing around the edge of a flat roof (it prevents those unpleasant red stains as bodies hit the ground below!), planting mixed seeds in a field (makes it very difficult to harvest) etc. You can see the point of all these regulations; mainly to stop people coming to harm, and property from being stolen or damaged, and just creating unnecessary work, so there must be a clear and unequivocal reason against being a consensual monogamous gay or lesbian. It simply isn't good enough to say: "Because the Bible says so!" That demonstrates ignorance.

It can't be argued that it is a similar situation to the Garden of Eden where a couple of the local gardeners were asked not to eat the fruit, as a test. If you accept the "Fall" exactly as written, **that** restriction affected the whole of humanity, whereas being gay or lesbian affects between 1.5 & 6% of the UK population (and varying,

but similar, percentages across the world, dependent on how free the country is, how the data is gathered, and the quality of the data), so for God to condemn being gay or lesbian for no good reason than 'because He can', is spiteful. He'd be a really rubbish God. If we say 'God has commanded it, and it doesn't matter why, we just have to be faithful to His commands', that's fine for you, because you probably don't have to live that life of hell, but for the gay or lesbian who was born with the orientation and didn't ask for all this trouble... Supposing God said everyone with a stutter, or with black hair, or curly hair, or white skin, or big hands, would be excluded from salvation, wouldn't you want to know why?

Let's take another example, but this time one that isn't so far out as that one. Remember that in Deuteronomy 23: 1 we read: "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord." We are talking here about eunuchs – eunuchs who have been made such, as distinct from being born as one. Being excluded from anything isn't nice, but suppose instead of being excluded from the assembly, the penalty was death or exclusion from the presence of God. Wouldn't you want to know why? You might say, "Well it would affect so few, so that's all right". It wouldn't be all right for the few! So, I make the case that you must ask the question "Why?" "Why would God make it so difficult for Gays to receive salvation, and so easy for everyone else?" Or more accurately, "**Why** would God condemn homosexuality?"

It would be in direct conflict with his stated intention that forgiveness be offered to 'whoever' (NIV and many other versions of John 3: 16) wants it. The tenderness of God can be seen in Psalm 103:

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
² Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits--
³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
⁸ **The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.**
⁹ **He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever;**
¹⁰ **he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.**
¹¹ **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;**
¹² **as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**
¹³ **As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;**
¹⁴ **for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.**

*¹⁵ As for mortals, their days are like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children--
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.
¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.
²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.
²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.
²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, my soul.*

The text in bold is important, and the highlighted text, really significant. If someone is sincere in their desire to love God, He will recognise that, and His love and compassion will be poured out on them. God pours His Spirit out on us though we continue in our sins, not just those of omission and commission, but also of intent, and thought. Why should God not pour out that same Spirit on the gay and lesbian, who has no choice about their orientation? They don't sin by being gay, but they do sin, in exactly the same ways as the rest of us – there is no difference between us.

By the way, the word "fear" in verse 11 is better understood as "awe", so it could be rendered as: *so great is his love for those who have awe for him.*

What about verses 13 and 14? The Psalmist uses the tender Father/Child picture, almost saying as the Father "Look I know how you've been made, and I can make allowances for that, because I love you."

We have oft-quoted Paul's writing to the Romans, and I want to use another chapter from that book to make a brief point about how we deal with those who hold ardently different views to our own.

In Romans 14 Paul writes:

*¹ Accept those whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters.
² One person's faith allows them to eat everything, but another person, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted that person. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master they stand or fall. **And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.***

⁵ Some consider one day more sacred than another; others consider every day alike. Everyone should be fully convinced in their own mind.

⁶ Those who regard one day as special do so to the Lord. Those who eat meat do so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and those who abstain do so to the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷ For we do not live to ourselves alone and we do not die to ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat your brother or sister with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, we will all give an account of ourselves to God.

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother or sister for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve. ²³ But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Essentially, what Paul was saying was by all means be convinced in your own mind about your practices and theology, but don't force it on others, particularly those who are weaker than you. You may persuade someone to adopt a specific attitude about something, but if they don't know or understand why, you will undermine their faith. If you disagree then keep it between you and your Lord. To a degree this goes back to the attitudes we spoke of at the beginning of the essay between

the non-affirming church and the LGBT+ community, where both sides were shouting at each other and covering their ears, so they couldn't hear the reply. That is not acceptable, and we must put Paul's words into practice. That doesn't mean we compromise our stance, but that we fundamentally change the way we express our views. We may have to sit quietly and just wait for an opportunity to express our thoughts, and then we choose our words very carefully and in deep love and respect of those who might feel hurt – possibly even remaining silent for the good of the weaker person. Many articles I've read during the research of this essay have been written in anger and hurt: gays hurt by the attitudes of the church and people within the church fighting what they feel is a rear-guard battle against the forces of Satan, "the spirit of the age", and finding some of their own (like me) seemingly betraying the cause and going over to the enemy. Both groups must be careful. There are deeply loving and concerned Christians on both sides of the debate, and many victims of "friendly fire", and this must stop.

There are a few more verses I want to quote here from Acts 10 and 11. It is the story of Peter being challenged by God to go and take the Gospel to the Gentiles. (Maybe we are today's Jews, and the LGBT+ community are the Gentiles?) God shows a hungry Peter a whole load of unclean animals and tells him to "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter effectively tells God "No chance!" Then God makes an incredible comment in verse 15: *'The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."* ¹⁶ *This happened three times, ...'*

This means that no Christian can call anyone an "abomination", especially someone who is also a fellow believer made by, and in the image of God - ever! I must stress that, after all, verse 16 indicated this dialogue happened three times, and whenever that happens in Scripture we know it is imperative. Not only that but we can't make the excuse that God was only talking about food. This was a Divine Principle, and Peter recognises that this applied not just to food but to everything, including people, because when he gets to the house of Cornelius he tells him in verse 28: *"But God has shown me that I should not call **anyone** impure or unclean. ..."* [Emphasis mine but strongly endorsed by Scripture.]

Later, Peter speaks to the assembled family and friends and says:

*'I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favouritism** ³⁵ **but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right.** ... ⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ 'Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.'*"

Not only that, but Peter then explains himself to the church in chapter 11: 1-18. He tells the story again including the sheet being let down three times. Effectively the principle has been given to us eight times: three times in the initial story, three

times in his report to the church, once in Peter's comments to Cornelius, and once at the start of his message. How important is that then?! Not only that but the Holy Spirit fell on this family group, to the astonishment of Peter and his companions (10: 45-47), and he comments to the church in chapter 11 verse 15 that: *"the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"*

Just now I said that 'no Christian can call anyone an "abomination" - ever!' Yet far too frequently we see unpleasantness being directed at those we don't like. In March 2015, Michael Overd a Christian street preacher was found guilty of a public order offence while preaching on the streets of Taunton. Premier.org.uk reported the story <http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Street-preacher-convicted-over-homophobic-sermon> saying:

Speaking to Premier Mr Overd claimed he was mirroring Jesus' style of teaching. He said: "Liars, thieves, drunkards, fornicators; Jesus offended people as well. That's why they crucified him because he was a very offensive man."

The street preacher then defended the right to target gay people and Muslims, stating: "They're sinners and Hell bound because they deny the truth of the Bible.

"Because of that, they break the commands of God with hearts that don't love God. They are not born again and will face judgement".

From a personal point of view this leaves me very uncomfortable. The Jesus preached in this case, and by many other speakers, is not the Jesus I read about in the Gospels, nor the one I invited into my heart when I became a Christian. I do not know the Jesus Mt Overd speaks about. The only time Jesus used language that was designed to stop folks in their tracks was when it was targeted at the established church of his day and you'll cite the occasion of Jesus in the Temple. However, you must notice that he was directing His ire against the merchants who had set up their stall in the court of the Gentiles in the Temple. This was the only place in the Temple where Gentiles could express their worship of God, and it was now a street market. The Jews could continue their worship in the rest of the Temple, but Gentiles were forbidden entrance to all other parts of the temple. However, I believe His anger in the Temple was really directed at the Religious leaders who had sanctioned and encouraged the market. In every story where Jesus seems to get a bit crotchety, His anger is directed at the Sadducees and Pharisees listening in the crowd, but he **never** displayed anger to others; whether people of other faiths, or none, nor outsiders, and certainly not the man-in-the-street. In Jude's letter, he writes in chapter 1: 9-10a:

*⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, **did not himself dare to condemn him for***

slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰ Yet these people speak abusively against whatever they do not understand;

From our perspective, the archangel Michael knew everything bad that Satan had done, and he was on a mission from God, so he had no lack of authority, yet he holds his tongue. Again, in Philippians 4 Paul writes: ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

So, if Jesus wasn't abusive and we are told that even the angels are careful what they say, why do **we** think it's okay to verbally abuse someone?

Whatever you think of those you disagree with, please be careful how you talk about them, whether they are followers of Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, or those in the LGBT+ community, who, may in fact, be your brothers and sisters in Jesus.

Instead, I believe the writer of Psalms has it about right when he writes in chapter 145:

⁸ *The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

⁹ *The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made. ...*

*...¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.*

¹⁸ *The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

¹⁹ *He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.*

If those I call friends are crying to God, I believe He is gracious, extends His love to them, draws near to them, has compassion on them and saves them.

I can now say that I am happy to stand before God and say that the views I now hold are my best attempt at reconciling Scripture with what I understand to be God's character and teaching. I don't believe I am, but if I am wrong, it's not through lack of effort and failing to examine Scripture properly. God knows my heart.

– Chapter 15 –

Marriage and Conclusions

We are not far from the end now and we have looked at the issue about whether there is a conflict between being LGBTQ+ and being a Christian/and having a role in a church. We have looked at this from many perspectives in the course of this essay: genetics, statistical expectations, nature (observations and expectations), logic, ethics, morality, social justice, physical and mental health, scripture and theology. I hope no-one will object with my putting scripture and theology at the end of that list, but as a reminder pointing back to the start, I've done that deliberately so that we are clear about what I am writing about, before going to Scripture to see what that says about it. For me, there is no compelling evidence from any of these, indeed I would say, no evidence at all requiring that I should hold onto my previous position - that being LGBTQ+ is against God's desire for us.

Furthermore, I think there is much more evidence to say we should open our arms and embrace the community, recognising that they too bear the image of God, and have a calling to play a full part in God's Kingdom just as they are, with all the gifts and abilities that God has given them. To misquote, but to re-apply Paul's teaching, that, in God's eyes there is neither male or female, straight nor gay, us nor them – we are all one in Jesus.

If I take a more tolerant view of homosexuality, what do I believe God requires of the LGBT+ person, and is it more than He requires of me? Of course not! Essentially, and morally, unless God has given a clear and specific call to a specific person, His requirements must be the same as His requirements of the rest of us – to live our lives focussed on Him day by day and to welcome the ministry of the Holy Spirit into our lives, to equip us for works of service, done in His Name. And (I know this is the fifth time I've quoted this!) we mustn't forget Micah 6: 8, which says:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

So, the same requirements apply to all of us, whatever our orientation. Even Paul's teaching in Romans 12:18 that *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* applies to every one of us calling ourselves "Christian." Each side of the debate will need to review their thinking and see whether their attitudes might upset the other and work hard to ensure friendships are maintained.

From the main body of the essay, you can see that in my view, there is clearly nothing that condemns the homosexual. However, my view is that where the English-speaking Bible uses the term "homosexual" and where we use the same term, we are comparing apples and pears – they are describing different things. As I've said before, along with a growing number of Christians I believe the New Testament passages to be referring to exploitative, abusive and coercive acts, not a situation of mutual compassion, empathy and caring. This interpretation would be

very much more in line with the other behaviours condemned in what we refer to as the “vice lists”. People guilty of all the other vices can and regularly do choose to change, whereas LGBTQ+ folk **cannot** change. There is no silver bullet you can use to change the sexuality and orientation of a person. However, I hope that the weight, thoroughness, and content of this essay will prove as compelling to the traditional, non-affirming anti-homosexual theological argument, as it does for me.

That is not the end however, because if we change our views and embrace the LGBT+ community, there must be more than just an intellectual response. We must get involved, and get our hands dirty, put ourselves in situations we might previously never have considered. Just as we said a short time ago when talking about the Black Lives Matter” campaign, if you say nothing when folks are physically or verbally attacked, it gives tacit permission and agreement that you stand with the attack, and the same goes with allying myself with the LGBTQ+ community.

One of **my** early challenges was accompanying a Trans-woman on her journey to undergo surgery to complete her transition. For you it might be going on your local Gay Pride march, or helping at one of their events, or just being a friend to someone who has frequently known rejection, or it might be that you need to challenge your church which has “All are welcome” sign by the door – but in very small print, they have “providing they are not...gay, trans, homeless, black, an immigrant, ...”. Inclusivity means welcoming allcomers, regardless of background, gender, race, ability, sexuality, intellect, social class, etc. We are all different and God puts us all in different situations, so embrace them. Specifically, stand with the LGBT+ community. Be their ally, but more than that, be their friend, embrace them, see what spiritual gifts they have, and encourage their faith, bring a little bit of Jesus to them, welcome them into your church if they are brave enough to come, defend and stand with them if they attract criticism, use your imagination! Learn and talk to folk, about what it costs to be LGBTQ+

After finishing the first draft of this essay late in 2015, I came across a great, if lengthy (you might call it brief in comparison to where you have come to with me!), essay by the Rev Bruce W Lowe, written in 2001, called “A Letter to Louise: A Biblical Affirmation of Homosexuality”. I alluded to it in the last chapter and had downloaded it much earlier in the year but hadn’t read it properly until I came across it again on a different website. I suspect I downloaded it, started to read it and then stopped, because I realised, I wanted to write a personal document, not re-hash someone else’s excellent work. I had started this work wanting to consider the strengths and weaknesses of how I reconciled being LGBTQ+ with the Bible teachings. “A Letter to Louise: A Biblical Affirmation of Homosexuality” is on the web site <https://godmademegay.weebly.com/the-letter.html>, and can be downloaded here: <https://godmademegay.weebly.com/download-the-letter.html>. Please go and read it.

It is a very thorough letter written to a friend of fifty years who was “heavy-hearted” because her brother was gay and hating God for making him gay. Bruce

Lowe looks at what the Bible says as well as other sources, including reputable professional bodies. He is writing a scholarly piece, so for folks like me, some of it is hard work, but well worth the effort. One thing he mentions, which I found fascinating was that:

There is an interesting note from church history.

[Noted church historian] John Boswell... has discovered that, whereas the church did not declare heterosexual marriage to be a sacrament until 1215 C.E., one of the Vatican Library's earliest Greek liturgical documents is a marriage ceremony for two persons of the same sex. The document dates to the fourth century, if not earlier. In other words, nine centuries before heterosexual marriage was declared a sacrament, the church liturgically celebrated same-sex covenants.

I'm not going to quote any more of it here, because I wouldn't know what to include and what to leave out! Go and look for yourself, and you'll also get the reference for the above paragraph. I don't agree with every word but some of that may be my own ignorance and lack of scholarly / theological training. In 2011, when he was 95yrs old and three years before his death in October 2014, Bruce Lowe wrote a follow-up article, which I also wholeheartedly commend: <https://godmademegay.weebly.com/six-points.html>.

There is a second thorough article written as an extract from a book by John and Catherine Shore, called "UNFAIR: Why the 'Christian' View of Gays Doesn't Work", which was published on the Huffpost website: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-shore/the-best-case-for-the-bible-not-condemning-homosexuality_b_1396345.html. Again, it is well worth reading in full if you can give it the time – and don't mind Verizon using your data!

In this essay, I've only been focussing on the consensual monogamous gay or lesbian, because just as sex outside a committed and consensual monogamous heterosexual relationship is seen as Biblically wrong, so it will be with the gay or lesbian. Why should it not?

It is clear from what I've already said that I am now insistent that churches should be welcoming of Lesbians, Gays and Trans. Somewhat surprisingly, I find myself, after a lifetime of treating Freud with suspicion, agreeing with him when he wrote in 1935 to a mother worried about her son: "*Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of... no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variant of the sexual function...*"

I end it there because most of psychiatry and medicine today would disagree with the rest of his sentence: "*produced by a certain arrest of sexual development.*" However, he did go on to make some helpful observations: "*Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them. (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime – and a cruelty, too.*"

How do we symbolise a relationship that is mutually committed? Usually through marriage, but until recently this wasn't an option for our friends in the community.

So should Gays/Lesbians be able to marry?

Where do I stand on this contentious issue? It divides Christians across the Western world. It hasn't yet touched the Eastern churches much, from what I've heard, because Homosexuality is still very much under wraps. Spoiler alert: of course, they should be able to marry – indeed, in my view, they should be encouraged to marry!

Firstly, the term Gay Marriage needs to be done away with. It's either marriage or it's not. I am not in a straight marriage, or a British marriage, or a white marriage, or a Christian marriage, I am simply married. I may be non-gay, British, white and a Christian, but none of those truly define me. I am married. To be married is to share a whole life commitment, or in Biblical terms, a covenant, with a person, and I/we (who have a faith in Jesus) chose to formulate that in a church before God asking His blessing and involvement. Nothing in that previous sentence needs be any different for someone who is a Christian, but also Lesbian or Gay. So, let's drop that dreadful prefix of "Gay" marriage – it's quite demeaning and offensive. As I just mentioned, Biblically, the marriage is seen as a covenantal relationship between the two partners, commonly a man and a woman. The Anglican church sees Marriage as: a) between a man and a woman; and, b) where both parties make vows in the presence of God. From my own reading, (e.g sub-secs 7 & 8 of the pastoral statement from the House of Bishops of the Church of England on Civil Partnerships issued in January 2020²⁹.) they don't explicitly talk about Covenant, although I hope they would see it as inferred. While society doesn't really view marriage as a covenantal relationship, I feel we as Christians, ought to, as advocated by Malachi 2:14 (extract: *"the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. ... she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant"*). Does that preclude our LGBT+ friend's? Why should it, given what we have explored?

Getting back to the issue about gay people getting married, I need to set the scene. In the introduction to Bishop Alan Wilson's book *'More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage'*, Dr Jeffrey John, Dean of St Albans writes:

Why should gay people demand marriage and not be content with the Church's (belated and partial) acceptance of civil partnership? Because accepting civil partnership but not marriage is like letting black people on to the bus but still making them sit at the back. (Kindle Locations 42-44). Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Part of me loves that analogy and part of me is uncomfortable with its historic reference to black segregation, but it makes a clear point. So rather than allow one headline quote to fix policy, I want to take things a little deeper. Let's begin by

²⁹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Civil%20Partnerships%20-%20Pastoral%20Guidance%202019%20%282%29.pdf>

looking at some defining questions. Christians get very precious about the term 'Marriage' and read into it all sorts of things that the Bible doesn't really support. So, what is the difference between Christian Marriage and any other form of marriage, anyway? Before I answer that question, we need to ask what is Christian Marriage?

The Bible only ever refers to marriage, not Christian Marriage. When I was a child growing up in the sixties, and going out to work in the seventies, nobody ever used the term "Christian Marriage". We only ever talked about 'marriage'. Doing an internet search for the etymology of the term "Christian Marriage", pulls in results mainly looking at the word "marriage" but only very rarely, "Christian Marriage". On a wholly subjective personal basis I can only remember people starting to use that term, sometime around the Eighties/Nineties/Millennium, give or take, perhaps. I think it was a term invented by Christians to essentially differentiate us from 'them' — 'them' in this instance being those who wanted a legal status for their relationship, without marrying, and LGBTQ+ people who wanted the right to marry. I believe it came out of the American Religious Right that spawned Moral Majority and included Christian fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals. Moral Majority has closed but the effects of the Religious Right are still very much in effect as we saw with the election of Donald Trump, whose victory benefited from securing over 80 percent of the white evangelical vote, and even when he lost the subsequent election, he secured over 75 percent of the white evangelical vote.

Getting back on topic, Christians wanted to show that our marriages were divinely blessed and 'yours' aren't. However, when one engages with much of Evangelical Christendom nowadays, they give the impression that what we understand as "Christian Marriage" has been with us since the time of Christ, which is wholly spurious, and lacks theological credibility. Marriage has changed markedly over the course of time, and marriage as we understand it today, is nothing like that of the Victorians, the Victorians nothing like the Elizabethans, the Elizabethans nothing like the Vikings (or to be fairer, the Christianised Anglo-Saxons), or the Romans, or right back to Biblical times.

By way of some history, I want to go through some details about marriage in the Middle Ages, and for this was listening to a Podcast on the BBC HistoryExtra website, <https://www.historyextra.com/>.

Churchmen in the 12th Century were debating "what makes marriage"? They ultimately concluded that all that was required was the freely given "Consent" of the two people concerned - and nothing else - no witnesses, no church, no consent of family, and it doesn't even need sex. So, marriage could be 'undertaken' simply by the two people agreeing to marry away from anyone else. This was the *legal* stance of the church, but society often required more.

This idea of "Consent" was exchanged by any one of the following:

- "Words of present consent" (Verbal) - like each saying, "I marry you" or "I take you as mine", and the parish priest did not have to be present. This was regarded as marriage for life and was indissoluble. It may have been

easy, but as it was indissoluble, you couldn't get out of it, and there could be no excuses of "I was just joking".

- "Words of future consent" - like each saying, "I **will** marry you" and then expressing your present consent by having sex (Verbal and Physical). Once again it was indissoluble.
- Finally, Gesture: Gift exchange - a man might make a gift to his intended and if she accepts it, she would become his wife. The gift would often be a ring. The giving of a gift was called a Wed - I wonder what that became!

The specific podcast dealing with marriage in the Middle Ages, can be found at <https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/lecture-medieval-love-marriage-sally-dixon-smith-podcast/>³⁰.

Over time as society changed, this evolved from something done privately to something more public, so today we have elements of all three, where we get engaged (we give Future Consent) but the church discourages sex before formal marriage. Then we give words of Present Consent (promises/vows) and round it off with the Gesture - the exchange of wedding rings.

So, we can see it is a complete nonsense to say marriage today is Christian or Biblical Marriage – it is a product of our society, but influenced by our current religious understanding – by that I mean that if we are Christian, that will feed into our sacrament, and if we are Jewish, Moslem, Hindu, Pagan, etc., that will influence the ceremony accordingly. Unfortunately, Christians usually use the term '**Christian Marriage**' for any male/female marriage, when, in reality, only a small minority of those marriages will truly be 'Christian'.

Bishop Alan Wilson in his book '*More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage*', gives a particularly good potted history of marriage through the ages, so if you haven't already, go and buy it, and read what he has to say.

From an Anglican perspective:

"Christian marriage means the marriage of Christians; the union of a man and woman who believe in God, who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who join in the worship, the sacraments, and the fellowship of the Church.

This last implies the sacrament of Baptism as a requisite. When a baptized man and woman agree to live with each other for life, and that union is consummated, the sacrament of holy matrimony has taken place, even in the absence of priest or Church. The blessing of the Church, ministered to the parties by the priest, conveys the grace to keep the vows given and received and to live chastely in the estate or status of matrimony. And of course the marriages of Christians should be solemnized by God's priest, when that is possible." An Instruction

³⁰ Dr Sally Dixon-Smith is Curator of Historic Royal Palaces. She is the Collections Curator at the Tower of London, where she curated the re-presentation of the Crown Jewels in 2012; the 'Poppies at the Tower' in 2014, and others. 2004 - 2006 Lecturer in Medieval History, University of St Andrews

by Father Hoffmann, SSJE

http://anglicanhistory.org/ssje/hoffman_marriage.html

From that perspective, to my mind, two committed Christian Lesbians or Gays who marry, will be in a Christian Marriage.

Maybe I should also ask what marriage is, because it has changed radically over the years. Christians talk about Biblical and Christian marriages, but many of them don't really look at the Bible, and when they do, it's only through selective rose-coloured spectacles. In the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, but also in a few places in the New Testament (the Pharisee's story about the woman with 7 husbands, for one), sexual exclusivity is never a requirement of marriage, although faithfulness, is. As we have already seen, many men had multiple wives: who could be a wife, a concubine, or a slave (most likely the property of the wife). Most men (Christian or not) joke about how they've got to be careful at home – "mustn't upset the wife!" or "I'll let you know if I can come, after I've consulted 'she who must be obeyed'!" But that isn't marriage as pictured in the Bible. In the Biblical period, the wife had no choice about what happened and who was to be her husband. Throughout much of human history, marriages have been arranged by parents, relations, the clan, or the community. It is only in recent times, historically speaking, that it was possible for two people who had fallen in love to decide to marry of their own volition. Some men, out of respect and a tipping of the hat to historical tradition, still approach the future father-in-law to seek his permission to marry his daughter. (Don't forget that arranged marriage was the system in operation at the time Jesus lived and taught.) The wife was also seen as property, not as an equal. Nobody really wants a return to that. Just to illustrate that, look at Jeremiah 8:10 where God through Jeremiah is saying that because of the wickedness of His people, He tells them He would give their wives to someone else, presumably who would treat them better, or more probably it simply represents the loss of property as a result of conquest. The passage reads: *Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?*¹⁰ *Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.*

In fact, it has only been in the last few years (maybe 50 or so, here in the 'West') where women in general have had any success in seeking to be treated as an individual. Much of the reason for that change in outlook is due to the two World Wars where so many men were killed, making it necessary for women to do jobs previously only done by men. I have used sporting stories several times throughout this essay, and here is another useful quote from Bishop Alan Wilson's book 'More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage'

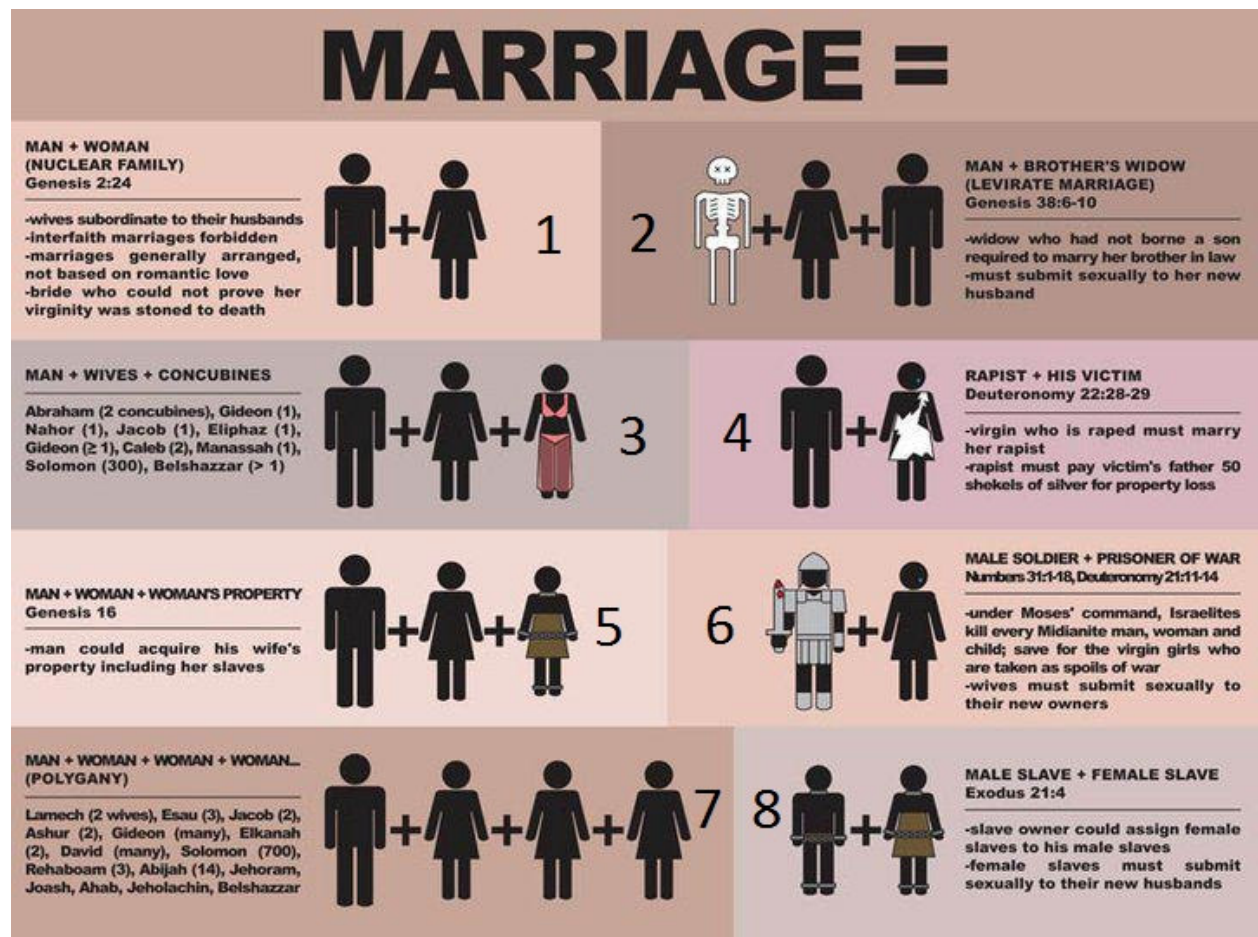
In 1928, at Amsterdam, female runners first competed, but when a few of them collapsed at the finishing line of the 800-metre race, it was taken as conclusive evidence that their bodies were not made for such exertions. Future women's Olympic races were limited to 400 metres. This decision stood until 1960. Marathons were unthinkable. People

shuddered to think of the awful damage running 26 miles would do to female reproductive machinery. Kindle Locations 538-540). Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Using that logic what do you make of seeing male athletes lying on their backs after the 200 and 400 metres events?! So, it is only within my lifetime that women have been allowed to compete in the Olympics. It would be easy to get side-tracked here and look at all the other areas where women have not been treated as equals, but I have taken enough detours, so let's get back to what constitutes as marriage.

Religious Tolerance (http://www.religioustolerance.org/mar_bibl0.htm) have a helpful infographic showing the eight different types of Biblical marriage. Yes, eight, and we thought there was only one. Indeed, we are regularly taught there is only one – and that is Christian Marriage. How wrong! I have summarised the marriage types but included their infographic.

They are as follows:



(This infographic has been used many times on the internet, in blogs and information pages, and I can't trace the creator. So, if you can verify it is you and you would like to be credited with authorship, or wish me to remove the image, please send me an e-mail via the website.)

1. Man & Woman (Gen 2:24) This is where some will want to stop the count!

2. Man, and deceased brother's childless widow (Levirate marriage) (Genesis 38: 6-10 and many other places). Don't get the idea that Levirate marriage didn't really count on the grounds that the wife was properly married to her first husband and was then simply passed to the brother(s) on the death of her husband. It's quite clear from Matthew 22: 23-27 (Mark 12:18-23 and Luke 20: 27-33) that the last marriage granted the same rights and legal access as the first. If, under the Law, simply the first marriage counted as a marriage, and the other ones were purely a formal device to pass on the property, the question the Sadducees asked (Which of the brothers was she married to in God's sight?), would have been nonsensical, because anyone answering the question could say "The first brother, naturally because the others didn't count". The question only works because the marriage status is the identical for every brother in turn.
3. Man + Wife + Concubine(s) (Check out Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and many others, and refer to the earlier section in this essay about Concubinary).
4. Rapist + his victim (Deut. 22: 28-29). How do you feel about that? This is similar to Exodus 22: 16-17. There are two differences though: The Exodus passage implies possible consent, whereas in the Deuteronomy passage there is no consent; secondly, in the Deuteronomy passage there is a lifetime bar on divorce, which isn't there in Exodus. However, the result is the same – they marry, and the man pays the bride's father.
To our minds the idea of a woman being forced to marry her rapist is utterly repugnant, especially given that the violent abuse that started the relationship is likely to be typical behaviour for that man, throughout the marriage, which cannot be ended. At this stage women did not instigate divorce, because the man was the head, and the woman did not have equal status, she was just property, and I can't be divorced by my wardrobe!
5. Man + Woman + woman's property. That is, any slaves his wife brought into the marriage (Genesis 16). The husband had rights to have sex with not just his wife, but her slaves.
6. Male soldier and prisoner of war (Numbers 31: 1-18; Deut. 21: 11-14) where virgin girls get taken as prisoners of war and become the property of her captor. I just need to horrify you a bit further. Those verses in Numbers 31 say: "¹⁷ Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, ¹⁸ but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man." In the text, the word translated as *girl* means a pre-pubescent girl. If she was intended purely as a slave, they could have spared all the women, but because the intent was clear, the other women had to die to prevent the chance of Israelite soldiers committing adultery, or contracting STD's. See <https://discover-the-truth.com/2013/11/14/bible-does-numbers-3118-sanction-pre-pubescent-marriages-child-marriage-2/> - the article is very well researched, and fascinating if you have time to read it through, but is unnecessarily critical in places and could have done with being more dispassionate in my view.

7. Polygamy – Many examples in the Bible. The list in the graphic is not exhaustive, and we dealt with this issue earlier in the essay.
8. Male and female slave (Exodus 21:4) – a slave owner could give a female slave to one of his male slaves. Note that the arranger of the marriage is the slave owner, and not one of the parties to the marriage. This might present a few problems, because both were no more than property of the owner, and the relationship of the new wife, would be not just the property of her owner, but of her husband as well, so both could legally have sex with her.

There is no room to wriggle and squirm saying that this type of marriage, or that, doesn't really count. All these are legally binding, genuine, and accepted forms of marriage, in accordance with the Law of God, so can be regarded as God-approved marriage.

As for Arranged Marriages, most marriages of that first type in the Bible, **were** Arranged Marriages, even in New Testament times. The rest were usually the result of circumstance. Some marriages were arranged after people had fallen in love with each other (perhaps 'fallen in lust' would be more accurate in some cases, like Samson). Not yet convinced there is a problem with today's clamour to "uphold Christian Marriage"? There is a good article written on the Christian Century website going into more detail. I wanted to just select key paragraphs, but there is a consistent thread of an argument running through it, so I need to reproduce as is:

What's the biblical definition of marriage? May 27, 2015 by
(Professor) Ronald A. Simkins

In the recent U.S. Supreme Court hearings on whether states have a constitutional right to ban (or refuse to recognize) same-sex marriages, the conservative justices seemed to be preoccupied with the definition of marriage. As Chief Justice Roberts stated, in response to advocate Mary Bonauto, "Every definition that I looked up prior to about a dozen years ago, defined marriage as a unity between a man and a woman as husband and wife. Obviously, if you succeed, that core definition will no longer be operable."

Whereas this and similar comments made during the hearing are perhaps true on their surface—marriage in the past has not been defined as a relationship between same-sex couples—such comments are misleading, suggesting that the definition of marriage has been unchanged "for millennia," or disingenuous. For example, later in the hearing, Justice Ginsburg corrected the historical record when she noted that in the recent past, "Marriage was a relationship of a dominant male to a subordinate female. That ended as a result of this court's decision in 1982 when Louisiana's Head and Master Rule was struck down." The so-called "traditional definition of marriage," used in conservative arguments, rarely takes into account the status of the

marriage partners, or the character of the marriage, both of which have changed and evolved with changing culture and values.

Often behind the traditional definition of marriage is the biblical tradition where, it is claimed, marriage was created by God between one male and one female, citing Genesis 2:24. Although this is not a definition of marriage per se but rather an explanation for why men and women join together in the social union we call marriage, the text may serve to justify heterosexual marriage. But what is the status of the partners and the character of the marriage? The immediate biblical context of this passage only gives a few indications: marriage is presented as the alternative to the man being alone; the woman is created to help the man; and the husband will rule over his wife. (Ephesians 5:22 simply says, "wives, be subject to your husbands.") Elsewhere in the biblical tradition, marriage should be within the extended family, tribe, or people; is arranged by the fathers; and is the result of an economic exchange. Is this the traditional marriage that the justices are concerned to defend? It is marriage between one man and one woman, but the wife is subordinate to her husband, has little or no choice to whom she marries, and certainly does not marry for love.

But this understanding of marriage is not the only definition endorsed by the biblical tradition. There are numerous examples of marriages between one man and two or more women (Jacob, Elkanah, David, Solomon, and others). Polygyny was widely practiced in the biblical world, as it is today in the Middle East, among those who can afford it. The biblical tradition endorses such polygynous unions and only expresses concern regarding marriage to foreign women and the possible favoritism toward one son based on favoritism toward one wife.

Related to polygynous marriages are marriages that involve concubines or slave-wives. Abram takes Sarai's slave-girl Hagar for a wife, and Jacob takes Rachel's slave Bilhah and Leah's slave Zilpah for wives. David had at least ten concubines. These wives are tantamount to the man's property; they are used for sexual and procreative purposes, and may be discarded at will.

The Levirate marriage also treats the wife like property. If a man dies before he produces a child, his wife, who belongs to her husband's family because of the economic exchange that resulted in the marriage, is given to one of her husband's kinsmen. Although the Levirate marriage provides some measure of economic and social security for the widow, she is forced into a marriage to fulfil a marital obligation (to have children).

Generally, the Bible warns against Israelite men marrying foreign women, largely because foreign women will continue to worship foreign gods and lead their husbands astray (as is the case with Solomon). But when a woman is captured in war, the Israelite man may marry her as long as he gives her a month to mourn her dead family. The man has taken possession of her through war. By a similar logic, if a man rapes an Israelite virgin, he must pay her father the appropriate bridewealth and then marry her. Unlike the foreign father who is killed in war, the Israelite father must be compensated as if he had arranged the marriage. In both cases, the woman has no say.

These examples of marriage in the biblical tradition illustrate the fluidity of the institution. To 21st-century Americans, these biblical understandings or definitions of marriage are strange and oppressive, but they are expressions of the culture and values of the biblical world. And as the culture and values of the society changed, so did its understanding of marriage. Society continues to change. In 2004, when gay marriage first became legal in Massachusetts, 61 percent of Americans opposed same-sex marriage. Today, gay marriage is legal in 37 states, and public opinion polls have ranged as high as 63 percent in favor. With such changing values, should we not expect the definition of marriage to also change? **It always has.**

<https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-05/what-s-biblical-definition-marriage> [Emphasis mine]

I must add Jesus' own words but will add a proviso afterwards regarding the context. The passage is one we have looked at several times – Matthew 19: 4-6:

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ 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' ? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

This is the church's default passage on marriage, and the context is that as we mentioned earlier, Jesus was speaking at the time when women were property and had no say over who they married – it was arranged by the family, frequently from the extended family and would be intended to maintain or raise their family's status within the community. That doesn't negate in any way at all, the words of Jesus, but we need to be aware that the status of women was very different, within that society – even if Jesus sought to raise it. So, if you really want an authentic Biblical marriage experience, recognise that traditional 'Biblical Marriage' is "marriage between one man and one woman, but the wife is subordinate to her husband, has little or no choice to whom she marries, and certainly does not marry for love".

You can also make the point that verses 4-6a are simply a **description** of what was happening, not a **command**. The command is "what God has joined together, let no one separate".

Let's get back to that other question, "What defines a marriage as a Christian Marriage?" Bishop Alan Wilson writes about it like this:

'I conceive that marriage, as understood in Christendom, may for this purpose be defined as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others.' This definition, minus mention of Christendom, used to hang on the walls of register offices. Registrars used to quote it during marriage ceremonies, with the preface 'marriage, according to the law of this country is ...'. At first hearing, this definition sounds timeless and absolute. In fact, this definition of marriage comes not from the Bible but a Victorian judge, LORD Penzance. The Purpose of which he spoke was assessing the legal status of Mormonism and polygamy in the leading case of Hyde v. Hyde and Woodmansee (1866).

More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage (Kindle Locations 1448-1455). Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Our concept of what Marriage is, takes far more from the culture of this land than it does from the Bible. At times, there have been strong Christian awakenings, resulting in Christian principles, at work within society, and those principles will have had an impact, but as personal spirituality within our nation, ebbs and flows, so will society's idea of the expectations and requirements of marriage. There is nothing in Scripture to give us the basis of a form of words to use in a similar way to those we use when observing the sacrament of Communion. Hence, marriage ceremonies can take many forms in many parts of the world. In fact, the marriage ceremony now is very different to that of a thousand years ago – or even of my grandparent's era. The dress code, the money spent on a wedding, the song/hymns sung, the technology (cars, cameras and drones), who actually officiates, are all very different – even the vows change. There is no one single acceptable form of marriage vows, so clearly the form of words isn't that important in the grand scheme of things. Having said that, every culture has its own version of what is deemed vital in the vows made by the couple. But what makes it important is that we make vows in the presence of God, and it is this that defines Christian marriage. Malachi 2: 14 says: "... *the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth.*" So, it's not the 'ceremony' that's important in a marriage, it's the couple's solemn covenant commitment in God's presence, with our family and friends acting as witnesses. Nowadays the church has made a fundamental part of Christian Marriage the fact that it must be between a man and a woman, citing the Matthew 19 passage above, but that foundation has a lot less supporting it than what you might think.

As mentioned just now, I see that passage as a **description** rather than a **command**. The only command there, is in not breaking marriage apart. Jesus was using the Creation story as the model, yet to interpret this as a command is to insert something that simply isn't there. Bear in mind that if the command for one man and one woman comes from this passage, we have a bit of a problem with the frequent polygamy of many of our favourite Old Testament characters. You could

perhaps give some leeway to those before Moses, but everyone after Moses (given Moses' close relationship to God, and his receiving of the Law from God) should have no excuse, and yet it's no big deal with the Bible saying very little to condemn David, and the others we looked at much earlier. Indeed, as we said previously there is a question about Moses, because he had two wives, although Scripture isn't clear whether Zipporah was still alive when he married again. Most of the time the Bible simply records the facts about who married whom without any judgement, even though the stories of the early Israelite kings are littered with comments like: "Nevertheless he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them." and "He followed the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the LORD." (2 Kings 3: 3 & 2 Kings 8: 27). The Bible isn't shy about condemning bad people, yet there is nothing to condemn polygamy, which we struggle with nowadays. It's almost like the Bible shrugs it's shoulders and says "So...? What's the big deal?"

My own suspicion is that God isn't that bothered by what we individually, and societally think of as a marriage (who and how many we marry), but He *is* concerned by the truth, respect, honour, and faithfulness I give to my spouse, and she (in my case) to me. I believe it to be far more about the **quality of the relationship** and how we draw each other closer to God, than the specifics of whom I have chosen as my partner.

We mentioned Abraham just now, and he is an interesting case because he fathered children not just through Sarah and Hagar, but through another wife and 'concubines' (plural). We are very familiar with the fact that he couldn't have children, but then God promised him an heir.

Sarah was Abraham's wife, but she was also his half-sister, which in today's British culture would be regarded as incestuous. Abraham and Sarah had the same father but different mothers, and this is confirmed in Genesis 20: 11-12 where Abraham had passed off Sarah as his sister for fear he would be killed so that Sarah could be taken to be someone else's wife:

¹¹ Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife'.

¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife".

Not only is there this apparent problem of incest to our minds, but Sarah didn't seem able to have children, so she gives Abraham her servant Hagar, who gave birth to Ishmael. Then later Sarah had her own son Isaac. What few folk remember is that Abraham later married someone called Keturah and had six children with her. Interestingly, although she is described as his wife in the following passage from Genesis 25, she is described in 1 Chronicles 1: 32 as Abraham's concubine. We are not told whether she married Abraham before or after Sarah died. He also had children from a number of other concubines, but we aren't given any more information than what appears in Genesis 25:

¹ Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. ³ Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Ashurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. ⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanok, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

⁵ Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶ But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

Abraham lived until he was 175 years old. Sarah died when she was 127yrs, and he was 136yrs, so he could have waited till then to marry Keturah, but we don't know. Keturah had six children and we know that he had other concubines, so he was fairly busy being a father, after so many years being childless!

Looking at this family set-up, we would probably think today that it was wrong, but surprisingly (to our cultural eyes) the Bible makes no comment of whether God says this was a good thing or a bad thing but simply provides the information with no commentary. You could make the case that God wasn't that bothered about how the family unit was constructed, because Abraham is commended by scripture and regarded as an example of a man of faith.

One final issue from that story before we move on. Abraham protects Isaac's inheritance, by giving his other sons gifts before sending them away so they would be no threat to Isaac. That is not the model of a 'Christian Family' we want to aspire to. It hints at threat, uncertainty, distrust, and all the time God is saying: "Well done! You're a fine man of faith!"

And so on to the next issue, and to a degree I've already revealed my thoughts throughout this essay, but what is marriage in the eyes of God?

One site lays it out like this:

There are three commonly held beliefs about what constitutes a marriage in the eyes of God:

- The couple is married in the eyes of God when the physical union is **consummated** through sexual intercourse.
- The couple is married in the eyes of God when the couple is **legally** married.
- The couple is married in the eyes of God after they have participated in a formal **religious** wedding ceremony. [My emphasis – PJ]

<https://www.learnreligions.com/biblical-definition-of-marriage-701970>

My own view, as you will have guessed, is that when sexual intercourse occurs, "*the two will become one flesh*" and in God's sight at least, the couple are 'married', regardless of any legal niceties. However, the implied assumption is that sex may have been enjoyed before the marriage ceremony. If, however, the couple have

remained chaste until the wedding day, then the wedding with its vows made in front of friends and family – or at least witnesses - would be the moment of legal marriage – so in essence, I would say whichever comes first, constitutes marriage. Much of the Bible’s teaching is related to intent and attitude and how our intentions towards others are so important, and on that basis, if it is purely on the basis of vows of commitment, perhaps the marriage is effectively taking place at the engagement, but solemnly recognised at the wedding. Anyway, that’s getting a bit complicated, so let’s leave it there!

Sex isn’t the only component of marriage, otherwise large numbers of us will be in trouble, especially as we age! Quality of relationship, trustworthiness, complete faithfulness, respect, and honour are all in there, as well as seeking to build up and encourage your partner to be the best they can be - all elements of a bi-directional “Covenant Relationship”. A Covenantal Relationship doesn't mean one that is exclusively between a man and a woman, (don’t forget David and Jonathan, and you can also make the case for many others, like Paul with some of the churches he founded, Barnabus and John Mark, etc) but perhaps it should be in play with whomever you chose as a life-partner. It should be a God-based quality of relationship, and therefore, in my view, not limited to one type of human relationship. Matthew Vines writes in his book, “God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships”:

In marriage, we’re called to reflect God’s love for us through our self-giving love for our spouse. God’s love for us isn’t dependent on our day-to-day feelings toward him, on how hard we work to please him, or even on how faithful we are to him. It’s grounded in his nature and his covenant. Ephesians 5: 1 tells us to be “imitators of God” (NASB). Because God’s love is boundless, ours should be as well. That means marriage isn’t, at its deepest level, just about our happiness and fulfillment. At its core, marriage is also about displaying the nature and glory of God through the covenant we make—and keep—with our spouse. [Kindle Page 136]

...it’s true that opposite-sex unions can reflect God’s image. At their best, they help show his covenantal love for us. But why can same-sex unions not do the same? Non-affirming Christians often think of same-sex orientation as a mere code word for disordered or sinful sexual desires, but that perspective overlooks a critical aspect of what it means to be gay. Sexual orientation involves much more than just sexual attraction. For both gay and straight people, it also encompasses our capacity to channel our physical attractions into a lifelong covenant with another person. That covenant-keeping capacity is essential to who we are as creatures made in God’s image. As Barth has argued, God created us so that we could be in covenant with him. Because same-sex orientation contains the potential for self-giving, covenantal love, it’s consistent with the image of God in us. [Kindle Page 156]

Which brings us back to the issue of whether we allow the sacrament of 'Marriage' for those who are gay! So long as they marry people of a different gender, our hearts do not skip a beat when we hear of abusers, paedophiles, rapists, torturers, and killers marrying, although we may not be ecstatic, so why the heck are we bothered about a relatively small perfectly normal group of people who fall deeply in love with someone who happens to be of the same sex. Many of these, exhibit all the traits of what we aspire to, as Christians.

In a sense, the arguments against are a bit empty. I guess the only difference between Christian Marriage and any other, is that the promises are made before our God. So, if a sincere Christian gay or lesbian couple wanted to marry and make their promises before God, and in His presence, it would dishonour Jesus for any of us to stop them. In any event, as Christians, we believe we can worship, pray, and honour God anywhere at all – God is not limited to a building. Thus, if two lesbian or gay Christians wanted to involve God in the ceremony, it seems to me that technically they wouldn't need to involve clergy, but simply include an opportunity to reflect that they are in God's presence, which might include silent or verbal prayer within which they can offer prayers and promises to God, as part of their public promises to their partner. Alternatively, ask a Christian friend to pray on their behalf.

In God's eyes, it won't make much difference, but humanly we remember special occasions, and special buildings, and people doing special things for us. Wouldn't it be so much better to encourage them by offering a recognised Christian Leader to conduct a service, in an appropriate building, the same as anyone else? As for me, clearly, I take a Side-A position (for those understanding that description) and I have concluded that is an excellent thing, that glorifies God, and is therefore to be strongly encouraged. Why would you want to stop them? Why try to stand between them and God – it doesn't sound very righteous to me.

Initially, I must admit I wasn't always sure about what I've just said, and emotionally I was uneasy, but logically it follows. However, these days, several years after I started writing, I'm not so sure why I was as uneasy. The following interview helped me a lot in those early days, and I agree with Tony Campolo.

Tony Campolo has traditionally been a conservative but willing and prepared to debate the 'gay' issue. In 2015, he became a lot more affirming of LGBT+ folk, but at the time *this* interview was published, he had not taken that position but was presumably moving along the road, towards his current position. His wife had been much more in favour of giving 'gays' their rights. I have provided a link in the Additional Resources at the end to their earlier much publicised debate, which is well worth a listen. On the Tony Campolo website there was a link to an interview of Tony by the Religious News Service. Here is an extract

(<https://religionnews.com/2013/12/17/tony-campolo-hits-hard-hot-button-issues/>):

RNS: *You've always taken a more traditional stance on gay marriage and homosexuality than some progressives, including your wife. How did you react to the Supreme Court's recent DOMA decision?*

TC: I was very pleased, but I felt that it didn't go far enough, and I think many people would say it should have gone further. What I have advocated, and I'm seeing this being picked up more and more is that there ought to be a clear distinction between church and state. We say that we believe in that, but it hasn't really been actualized in this case. My position has been, over the last several years, that the government should not legitimate gay marriage, and it should not legitimate heterosexual marriage. What it should do is guarantee the same civil rights to both kinds of couples. And if people want to call it a marriage, they should go down to the church, or the synagogue, or the mosque, and there have the marriage vows taken.

I believe marriage to be, as my Catholic and Lutheran and Episcopalian friends would say, one of the sacraments of the church. And the government should not be deciding who should and who should not engage in sacraments. That's the role of the church. So, I would like for us, in America, to do what some European countries do. If you want to get married, you do two things: you go down to the city hall and you register as a couple that is establishing a legal commitment to each other, with all the rights and privileges ascertaining thereto. But if you want to call it a marriage, you go to a church.

My critics will say, "Wait a minute. There will be people who go to certain liberal churches where they will marry gays." And my response is, "That should be their right." I believe in freedom of religion, and I believe that churches should be able to decide who they want to marry and who they don't want to marry.

However, while I am personally conservative on this issue, I really have problems with imposing my conservative values on who should get married and who shouldn't on the rest of society. Or even on the rest of the Christian community. I just don't think that's something I have a right to do. So, I think that what the Supreme Court did was positive in this sense: they gave all kinds of legal rights to gay couples that they didn't have before.

I have friends who are gay, and I know of one couple who is ecstatic because they're counting out the tens of thousands of dollars that they're going to save each year. They live in California. Their marriage is now valid, and they have all kinds of tax deductions, arrangements with insurance companies—buying automobile insurance, house insurance, health insurance—that they didn't have before.

Now here's the point that I want to make: I, as an evangelical, want to win people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It's hard for me to say, "I love you in the name of Jesus, but I am in favour of maintaining laws that deny you the basic rights that I enjoy." If I love

you, I want you to have the same rights and privileges that I enjoy. And if I don't do that, I don't love you, no matter what my language might in fact indicate. Love is more than just an emotional feeling. I hear people say, "I really love my gay friends." But what does that mean? That you have a warm fuzzy feelings inside? Love is something you do. And it's bringing justice to other people. You can't say "I love you" if I don't work for justice on that person's behalf. And if I don't love you, it's going to be nearly impossible for me to win you to Jesus.

The highlighting is mine and not in the original article. It's highlighted because I believe it to be tremendously significant. On the day I wrote this (2018 I think), I visited an Episcopalian church and was chatting with someone after a service, who claimed to have two lesbian friends, who she loved, but went on to tell me she supported the church who were considering severing their membership with their parent church body, because it was permitting same-sex marriage. Tony makes a very articulate and valid point in that final paragraph. I won't repeat it and comment on it, but just leave it there to ponder. As I begin to stand up for, and with, gay or lesbian friends and contacts, God help me meet that challenge.

As I mentioned just now, since Tony wrote that, his position has become clearer still. On June 8th 2015 he released the following statement on his website – of which this is an edit:

One reason I am changing my position on this issue is that, through Peggy, I have come to know so many gay Christian couples whose relationships work in much the same way as our own. Our friendships with these couples have helped me understand how important it is for the exclusion and disapproval of their unions by the Christian community to end. We in the Church should actively support such families. Furthermore, we should be doing all we can to reach, comfort and include all those precious children of God who have been wrongly led to believe that they are mistakes or just not good enough for God, simply because they are not straight.

As a social scientist, I have concluded that sexual orientation is almost never a choice and I have seen how damaging it can be to try to "cure" someone from being gay. As a Christian, my responsibility is not to condemn or reject gay people, but rather to love and embrace them, and to endeavor to draw them into the fellowship of the Church. When we sing the old invitation hymn, "Just As I Am," I want us to mean it, and I want my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters to know it is true for them too. ...

... However, I am old enough to remember when we in the Church made strong biblical cases for keeping women out of teaching roles in the Church, and when divorced and remarried people often were excluded from fellowship altogether on the basis of scripture. Not long

before that, some Christians even made biblical cases supporting slavery. Many of those people were sincere believers, but most of us now agree that they were wrong. I am afraid we are making the same kind of mistake again, which is why I am speaking out.

I hope what I have written here will help my fellow Christians to lovingly welcome all of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters into the Church.

Please read the full statement: <http://tonycampolo.org/for-the-record-tony-campolo-releases-a-new-statement/#.VX3o1GrnRqg>

I wish Christians would respect his view, even if they disagree with him, but sadly for a while he became a target of hate and vitriol for those who believe he has embraced the god of this age and has given in to societal pressures. This always happens when someone changes their stance and embraces the LGBT+ community, as we saw earlier from the experience Vicky Beeching, and we will see below an experience of the late Rev Eugene Peterson.

No-one can hate so passionately as a Christian. Isn't that a sad thing to write?

In July 2017, the late Eugene Peterson, the author of 'The Message' was being interviewed by Religion News Service. He was asked:

RNS: You are Presbyterian, and your denomination has really been grappling with some of the hot button issues that we face as a culture. I think particularly of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Has your view on that changed over the years? What's your position on the morality of same-sex relationships?

EP: I haven't had a lot of experience with it. But I have been in churches when I was an associate pastor where there were several women who were lesbians. They didn't make a big deal about it. I'd go and visit them and it never came up for them. They just assumed that they were as Christian as everybody else in the church.

In my own congregation — when I left, we had about 500 people — I don't think we ever really made a big deal out of it. When I left, the minister of music left. She'd been there ever since I had been there. There we were, looking for a new minister of music. One of the young people that had grown up under my pastorship, he was a high school teacher and a musician. When he found out about the opening, he showed up in church one day and stood up and said, "I'd like to apply for the job of music director here, and I'm gay."

We didn't have any gay people in the whole congregation. Well, some of them weren't openly gay. But I was so pleased with the congregation. Nobody made any questions about it. And he was a really good musician. I wouldn't have said this 20 years ago, but now I know a lot of people who are gay and lesbian and they seem to have as good a spiritual life as I do. I think that kind of debate about lesbians

and gays might be over. People who disapprove of it, they'll probably just go to another church. So we're in a transition and I think it's a transition for the best, for the good. I don't think it's something that you can parade, but it's not a right or wrong thing as far as I'm concerned.

RNS: A follow-up: If you were pastoring today and a gay couple in your church who were Christians of good faith asked you to perform their same-sex wedding ceremony, is that something you would do?

EP: Yes.

the <https://religionnews.com/2017/07/12/eugene-peterson-on-changing-his-mind-about-same-sex-issues-and-marriage/>

In response, a statement was issued by a spokesperson for LifeWay Christian Resources a large American Christian retailing company, which said: "LifeWay only carries resources in our stores by authors who hold to the biblical view of marriage.

"We are attempting to confirm with Eugene Peterson or his representatives that his recent interview on same-sex marriage accurately reflects his views. If he confirms he does not hold to a biblical view of marriage, LifeWay will no longer sell any resources by him, including The Message." <http://www.bpnews.net/49207/eugene-petersons-homosexuality-views-draw-baptists-focus> This link is also worth reading for context: <https://churchleaders.com/news/306614-lifeway-poised-pull-message-shelves-eugene-petersons-view-homosexuality.html>

Eugene Peterson's original comments seem very considered and clear, and yet sadly one day later, after the intervention by LifeWay, he capitulated, and retracted his comments. He said:

"I presume I was asked this question because of my former career as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA), which recently affirmed homosexuality and began allowing its clergy to perform same-sex weddings.

"Having retired from the pastorate more than 25 years ago, I acknowledged to the reporter that I "haven't had a lot of experience with it."

"To clarify, I affirm a biblical view of marriage: one man to one woman. I affirm a biblical view of everything."

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/The-Message-Bible-author-retracts-same-sex-marriage-statement>

LifeWay continue to stock his books. Their threats and "intimidation" of an aging saint of God, are a disgrace for any Christian, and one day they will have to answer to God. Eugene Peterson died on October 22nd 2018 of complications related to heart failure and dementia.

Eugene Peterson was a tremendously gifted man and his Bible version, 'The Message' is a real treasure. As has been written elsewhere, if 'The Message' was good before the article was published why would it be toxic afterwards? None of the content has gained or lost as much as a comma. This is the problem with so many Christians, not just publishers – the over-reaction, and an absolute failure to engage any form of intelligence, and a lack of preparedness to listen. How is God glorified by this utter stupidity? It's a modern-day version of stoning and putting someone outside the church, with no thought of how God's grace can be brought to that person if you think they are in error. However, this simply shows that if a Bible was printed that seemed more relaxed and affirming of Gays and Lesbians, the backlash would be immense. The big Christian publishing houses clearly determine the theological direction Bible Translators are allowed to travel in, so what chance 'Truth'? They put profit before grace and truth.

Let me give you two illustrations:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_International_Version - "The NIV underwent a minor revision in 1984. In 1995 a new version of the New Testament and Psalms was published in the UK, with the full bible following in 1996 as the **New International Version Inclusive Language Edition**, but was not published in the U.S. because of opposition from conservative evangelical groups there to inclusive language. A further edition with minor edits was published in 1999". More details can be found here: https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-09-01-bible-translation_N.htm

It looks like the publishers bowed to pressure not from Bible Translators, but from the buying public. The Christian public seem to be saying "we know what we want the Bible to say, so just make sure it says that, and we'll buy your book. We don't want Truth if it interferes with what we know".

2. In his "Letter To Louise" Rev Bruce W Lowe writes:
For the past several decades most Protestant denominations have been debating whether to affirm, and especially whether to ordain, homosexual persons. Many committees have been appointed to study the matter and make recommendations to their general denominational bodies or their churches. In case after case, the recommendations of the committees have been just about what I have said in this discussion, but when considered by the general assemblies/conventions or churches, those recommendations have been voted down.
I am impressed that those who have made a serious study of homosexuality—the members of the committees—have concluded that we should affirm fully gay and lesbian persons who come to our churches, while those who believe we should not affirm them are the ones who have not studied the matter. If they vote down affirmation

because they have not studied it, then they are voting on the basis of pre-judging, that is, prejudice. Prejudging, prejudice, is evil.

Although he is referring to the situation in America, I suspect it is no different within the English churches and he makes my case rather neatly, and as a recent example check out: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/united-methodists-fracture-lgbt-plan-rejected/583693/>.

I think that individual Christians who believe that marriage can only be between a man and a woman can go on believing that, even though I believe it to be wrong, but must not impose their prejudices on others. I use that word 'prejudice' deliberately, given how much ground we have covered. Consider the issue God hates most: Idolatry. How many Christians campaign against that? But also consider how many Christians are caught up in it: I must have a good salary; I must have a bigger house; I must have a new/better car with this years' registration; I must have an expensive holiday; I must have the latest new PlayStation/Xbox/iPad/laptop/tablet/Fitbit/phone; I must have my own way? There are times when you need one or two of those things when old ones have failed, or are failing, but that is not my point. Do you really NEED it? Throughout the Bible both God and Jesus taught that it's not how well you kept the law but "what did you do for the least of these?" We have already talked about Micah 6: 8, but in case you need a reminder it says: "**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God**". Christians love to worship at the idol of Law, not the altar of the Grace-giver. Nothing like the same passion is used to counter all things idolatrous, as is shown towards that which they think threatens marriage. Marriage is not an exclusively Christian institution, it is what the current specific society makes it. Christian's don't say that a Hindu/Shinto/Buddhist/Sikh marriage is wrong, or mustn't be recognised, even though from a Christian perspective Idols and spirits are involved at times. Being two-faced, having double standards – I think so. Yes, Pharisee's are still with us, and still as active as they were in Jesus' day.

Many years ago, I attended Greenbelt (the Christian Arts and music Festival). I loved it and went regularly for about 8+ years. I remember Steve Shaw (I think it was) talking about Christian world views. He used the example of a rubber sheet held within a frame. The rubber sheet was overlaid with a grid, and in each square, was an aspect of God's character, or some understanding/concept about Him. Steve was pointing out that if you focus on just one area, it's like grabbing that sheet at the appropriate square and pulling at it. It doesn't just distort that one square, but all the rest of them as well. This is the danger of getting ourselves consumed by this debate – we have less and less to say to those around us, because we become an anachronism. We are already increasingly regarded as irrelevant and yet our faith should be vibrant and relevant to every area of a person's experience – attractive, especially to those not yet in the church.

I have quoted from several books by Peter Enns, and I have one more. In winding up his *“Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament”*, he writes on pages 161/2:

Evangelical biblical scholars and students of the Bible (which includes informal study as well as college or seminary) regularly find themselves having to interact with the important developments in recent generations. And this is why the suspicion needs to come to an end. I am not suggesting that we throw caution to the wind and bow to every trend. Part of the academic quest is to be critical of evidence until such time that certain conclusions seem to present themselves naturally. But the attitude of an academic quest is very different from judgmental suspicion, which is a predisposition against new and different ideas that challenge existing ones.

*In some respects what drives this suspicion is fear that what is new will necessarily threaten the old, which is often uncritically equated with the gospel itself. I agree that modern biblical scholarship has handled some issues in ways that could certainly lead in that direction, and so fear is understandable. But fear cannot **drive** theology. It cannot be used as an excuse to ignore what can rightly be called evidence. We do not honor the Lord nor do we uphold the gospel by playing make-believe. Neither are those who engage the kinds of issues discussed in this book necessarily on the slippery slope to unbelief. Our God is much bigger than we sometimes give him credit for. It is we who sometimes wish to keep him small by controlling what can or cannot come into the conversation. The result is— what would have been soundly condemned by Christ himself and any New Testament writer— polarization and power plays among the people of God, the body of Christ, his ambassadors who are called by him to be his ministers of reconciliation to the world. The issue is not whether we disagree; that is healthy, provided it does not become an end in itself. The problem is that true Christians erect a wall of hostility between each other, and then churches, denominations, and schools split.*

It has been my experience that sometimes our first impulse is to react to new ideas and vilify the person holding them, not considering that person’s Christian character. We jump to conclusions and assume the worst rather than hearing— really hearing— each other out. What would be a breath of fresh air, not to mention a testimony to those around us, is to see an atmosphere, a culture, among conservative, traditional, orthodox Christians that models basic principles of the gospel:

- ***humility** on the part of scholars to be sensitive to how others will hear them and on the part of those whose preconceptions are being challenged;*

- *love that assumes the best of brothers and sisters in Christ, not that looks for any difference of opinion as an excuse to go on the attack;*
- *patience to know that no person or tradition is beyond correction, and therefore no one should jump to conclusions about another's motives.*

How we carry on this very important conversation is a direct result of why. Ultimately, it is not about us, but about God. We must be very careful not to confuse God's kingdom with our own. We do not engage in biblical study to build our own private kingdoms; we do so because God in Christ has allowed us to co-labor with him in a kingdom he has already built. Jesus had a thing or two to say about having only one master, serving in only one kingdom, and those words translate well to theological matters. We are all susceptible to private kingdom building.

We have a responsibility to be sensitive to the weaker brother or sister, so let's take it seriously. In finishing, it is appropriate to use that quote again from Billy Graham: "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love."

We all live with the effects of sin. My life is tainted by the Fall, and I won't be sinless this side of Glory, but one day I will be, and then none of this will matter, because there will be no marriage or giving in marriage – sex will be redundant, and our bodies will reflect who we are, regardless of the biology. It's a stupid question, but will we even need reproductive organs? In a resurrection body, what would they be used for anyway? So possibly not! However, if we are feasting with God, will the food and drink consumed, need processing, and the waste removing? Who knows? Who cares? One day we'll find out!

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3: 20-21

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, and stand with this precious group of people.

Well done for sticking with me, **especially** if you disagree!

Peter Johnson

Started 2015 - With further content added regularly ever since, as seen by the version numbers and last saved date! One of the first versions was completed in June 2015 and was 116 pages long – now it looks like a mere synopsis of the current one! Apologies.

Thanks

I need to thank Stuart for his enormous help. He read and critiqued two earlier versions of this document. He tried and failed to get me to reduce the length to about a third of the final page count – that's my fault and not his. What do I delete?! For every two pages I took out, one new page got added! Stuart, thank you. You helped more than you know.

Also huge thanks to: Martin, Tina and Vicky for giving my theology a push, even though you didn't know it!

Also, to Lina, Ian, and Reuben for the reassurance that I had not strayed from the pathway of Jesus, when I began to wonder at various times where my new path was leading me.

Additionally, to Don, Charles, Jane, Brenda, and Sarah, for your encouragement at various key times of the journey.

Finally, thanks to all the authors of books and web pages listed in the Resources pages. You helped me reform my theology, one that now works far more coherently than before, and hopefully making me more like Jesus as I went along.

Resource List:

I list here the resources I have referenced in my essay. If you find a broken web link or typos, please let me know. If you can tell me it's new web address, assuming you can find it, I would be grateful. If you have other suggested websites let me know and I will consider how well they fit the ethos of the site.

Books

All are in print, as of January 2021, and some are available on Kindle:

- 'Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America' – Rev Dr Mel White. Also see <https://www.melwhite.org/stranger-gate-audio/> where you can download the free audio-book.
- 'More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage' by Bishop Alan Wilson Longman & Todd Ltd. This is an excellent study about marriage from the Bishop of Buckingham and includes a potted history of marriage through the ages. Buy it!
- 'God and the Gay Christian' by Matthew Vines (Convergent Books). Also make sure you view his video I mentioned in several times in the essay at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>.
- 'Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free From Shame' by Vicky Beeching. Harper Collins. I have written elsewhere what a superb book this is. At times this book is heart-wrenching, so keep your box of tissues handy! At other times it causes the blood to boil because of injustice. Primarily it is the story of growing up and working through what being gay means in real life, in a real Christian family, in a real Christian church, and the pains largely inflicted by people who don't really understand what is going on. I think I would describe the book as being an updated version of "Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America" mentioned above, but written for Christians in the 2020's.
- <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/> The mission of Canyonwalker Connections, founded in 2011 by Executive Director Kathy Baldock, is to repair the division existing between social and Christian conservatives and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community through education, training, encouragement, and dialogue in both secular and religious environments. Once again it is great to read a site with a lot of well-written articles including a thorough historical background. Kathy Baldock has written a book, "Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach Between the Church and the LGBT Community". I strongly recommend reading this book as a background to the whole issue about why, since the 1960's being gay has been a problem for Christians, when prior to that time it wasn't. She has a further book planned for summer 2021 called "Forging a Sacred Weapon: How the Bible Became Anti-Gay." which looks at how the Bible has been weaponized in recent years. Furthermore there are two videos on YouTube (each one a proper seminar lasting more than two hours) called Unclobbering the Tangled Mess (Parts

one and two) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBwajcvZtqw>. If you want to understand the culture and history surrounding 'recent' Bible translations, this is a brilliant seminar, and I commend it. Remember that most Bible translations in the English language in the last 70 years have been commissioned and produced in America, and then, somewhat later, we might get an Anglicised version, so understanding the culture prevailing at the times of each translation is very helpful.

- "Our Witness: The Unheard Stories Of LGBT+ Christians" by Brandan Robertson (Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd.)
- "Gay Marriage – Why the debate? How should the church respond?" is a very good short booklet written by Neil Brighton for Poynton Baptist Church <https://freshstreams.net/wp-content/uploads/Gay-Marriage-why-the-debate.pdf>

Other Essays:

- Is Gay Prejudice Taught in the Bible? by Richard Wayne Garganta - <http://gayprejudice.com/GayPrejudice.pdf>. Richard has his own website at <https://richardwaynegarganta.com/>. He has been ordained but dislikes titles as they get in the way. This essay is very helpful and covers some of the material I have used, but I only came across it in 2020, long after I had finished writing my own work, other than minor edits. I notice we come to essentially the same conclusions but sometimes taking a slightly different route, which I found interesting. Richard's excellent document is 32 pages long, and well worth reading.
- "Letter to Louise". In my view this is a vitally important essay by the Rev Bruce W Lowe. It is long (short in comparison to my document!) but detailed, and once again I came across it late in 2015 after completing one of the earlier versions of my essay. I would regard it as a companion piece, although I would see things a little differently in places. Definitely a must-read if you are serious about the issue. Currently it is available here: <http://godmademegay.blogspot.co.uk/p/letter-to-louise.html>

Websites:

Any comments about particular websites below, whether positive or negative, simply represent my views on the day I visited the pages. In the time since my last visit, the editorial style may have changed for the better or worse, so please don't get upset if I say a website is great and when you visit you feel there is too much 'shouty' stuff going on – or vice versa! Some sites sadly seem to have gone into hibernation, with nothing new added for months or even years, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the content, currently available, has no value. I have removed references to articles originally freely available, but now behind a paid subscription login, since not everyone can afford that. If articles are behind free subscriptions, I have included them. I have tried to make sure that all the sites are valid at the time I write this, but they appear in no particular order:

- One of the most helpful sites I found, and sadly not at the beginning, of my search was this one: www.religioustolerance.org. Extremely useful.

- The Reformation Project is a Bible-based, Christian organization that works to promote inclusion of LGBTQ people by reforming church teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity. The site was founded by Matthew Vines. <https://reformationproject.org/biblical-case/>
- Rev'd Dr Jonathan Tallon, who describes himself as a New Testament lecturer and early Church researcher. He has created a brilliant set of videos, that are very helpful and I recommend that you watch them – you won't regret it: <http://www.bibleandhomosexuality.org/>
- A statement made by the LGBT+ support group Courage as they worked their way through the difficult area of reconciling issues of gay sexuality with their faith. <http://courage.org.uk/articles/article.asp?id=5> . I came across this after 'finishing' my essay late in 2015 and was pleased to see some of the issues I was pondering being addressed in their (much shorter!) document. Their home page is here: <http://courage.org.uk/default.asp> though it looks like the site hasn't been updated since 2012.
- <http://geekyjustin.com/> Justin Lee is an LGBTQ activist who set up Gay Christian Network in 2001. After he left in 2017, GCN became QChristian Fellowship, and he set up a new ministry called Nuance Ministries, which operates this website. He also runs a Podcast called "GeekyJustin Live: The Podcast", which is well worth a listen.
- QChristian Fellowship - <https://www.qchristian.org/> They say, "We are a diverse community with varied backgrounds, cultures, theologies and denominations, drawn together through our love of Christ and our belief that every person is a beloved child of God.". They have some interesting and helpful theological resources at: <https://www.qchristian.org/resources/theology>. The quality and quantity of these resources has been growing steadily over the last year or two. The site has hugely improved over this time, and now "cultivates radical belonging among LGBTQ+ people and allies through a commitment to growth, community, and relational justice."
- Additionally, QCF has partnered with The Trevor Project to launch [The Good Fruit Project](#), a comprehensive educational resource that presents a faith and researched-based case against LGBTQ+ change efforts.
- I have quoted Tony Campolo several times in this document. His website is: <http://tonycampolo.org/>
- Evangelicals Concerned Inc. is a US based site started by Dr Ralph Blair, referred to in his book by Mel White – Stranger At The Gate. The pages are very measured and without rancour and contain a lot of scholarly information written in an accessible manner. The HomePage is: <http://ecinc.org/> and there section on the clobber passages can be found here: <http://ecinc.org/clobber-passages/>. Their comment on the Leviticus passages is six lines long, is clear and does the job. How long did I take? Ouch!
- <https://whosoever.org/> Founded in 1996 and respected by many major figures within the LGBTQ+ community. There is a wealth of good materials on the site which was relaunched around Christmas 2019. Please go and

explore their material, which I highly commend, because it is produced in a professional and educated manner.

- Accepting Evangelicals - <http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/>. I thoroughly commend this site who state: "We are an open network of Evangelical Christians... who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life, and the development of a positive Christian ethic for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Accepting Evangelicals is for everyone who would call themselves Evangelical."
- For any LGBTQ+ Baptists, there is a site for you. It isn't very developed, but hopefully in the fulness of time, it will: <https://www.affirm.org.uk/>.
- A better site for Baptists is <https://baptistssm.weebly.com/resources> which has published some well-written letters in response to the stated position of the Baptist Union of GB to allow each church to determine its own thinking on the issue but *asking* that no church conducts a SSM out of respect for others – a somewhat untenable position to hold for long. That will have to change because the tension will cause a fracture at some point.
- More Light Presbyterians - <http://www.mlp.org/> who state: "We are individual members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (USA) who are faithful to God's call and believe that God continues to open new understandings of scripture and the Word in the life of Christ. As a Christian community, we believe that the church must seek to live out those understandings in our life together." The focus is on all LGBTQ Christians.
- If you are looking for an inclusive church, denominations like the URC, the Methodist church, Scottish Episcopal Church, Church of Scotland and a few individual churches are inclusive. If you want to find an inclusive church, have a look at: <https://www.inclusive-church.org/inclusive-churches>. Be aware that not all churches that regard themselves as 'inclusive' are listed. Although I have mentioned a couple of Scottish based denominations, from personal experience there aren't many inclusive 'Evangelical' churches in Scotland.
- Metropolitan Community Church worldwide. A church who truly welcomes those within the community. They were the first Christian denomination to provide help for those with AIDS. <https://www.mccchurch.org/>. If you are interested in finding a church near you, check: https://visitmccchurch.com/our-churches/?utm_source=MCC&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=mcc-nav-find-church.
- In the essay I quoted from a newspaper article about the Metropolitan Community Church in Glasgow, and you can find them here - <http://www.mccinglasgow.moonfruit.com/>.
- In London and several regional centres, Oasis provide a wonderful ministry to those within the community. See <http://www.oasiswaterloo.org/church>. The Open Church Network (<https://openchurch.network>), part of Oasis, is an online safe space for people – regardless of their sexuality or gender identity

to gather, share and discuss. But however much the world we live in is becoming increasingly digital, nothing can replace meeting face to face with members of a safe and secure local community.

- Open House – based out of Oasis Church Waterloo – is an opportunity for LGBTI+ people to do just that. It is a safe place where one can share their story without any hint of judgement, where one can reconcile their Christian faith to their sexuality and gender identity, where one can just listen to other stories and ask questions, a place where the doors are flung open to show the inclusivity of God. Open House happens on the third Tuesday of every month. For more information visit the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pg/asafespaceforlgbti/posts/?ref=page_internal.
- Still remaining with Oasis, see their Open Church Charter, which every church should be encouraged to sign up to: <https://openchurch.network/content/sign-open-church-charter>
- <https://jewishchristiangay.wordpress.com/> This blog is written by Alex Haiken (who holds a Master’s degree from Westminster Theological Seminary and is among other things a lecturer, teacher, blogger and conference speaker). At the time of writing, the site has been reasonably quiet since 2012, but there is a lot of good material to help the sincere questioner explore the issues. I wish there were more written at the depth of these articles, whilst written with the restraint Alex demonstrates.
- Created Gay is a site that includes a major section on theology, which at a cursory glance deserves more attention, which I haven’t yet given it! Evangelicals may be uneasy with it, because of its use of Scriptures outside the normal canon. <http://createdgay.com/>. They also have a list of over 300 Christian Gay websites of every shade and colour: <http://createdgay.com/links.html> - well worth a look.
- And to take a different theological slant to this essay, Dr Robert Gagnon: <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/GagnonHomosexuality.php>. I haven't included much in the way of resources taking the established position of the church, because most will have a good idea of the teaching, but Dr Gagnon is well respected and often quoted.
- Christian Gays – <https://christiangays.com> This is a community for LGBTIQ people of faith. This seems to be a good and reasonably balanced site with a kind heart. There is a huge resource of useful information (video and text) for both the straight and the LGBTQ+ orientated person. An additional useful page on the site is: <https://resources.christiangays.com/>
- “UNCHANGED is a movement of LGBTQ+ Christians committed to proclaiming God’s love and affirmation of our experiences, our identities, and our expressions of selves.” Quoted from its Home page. It started in 2019 as a ministry of Q Christian fellowship and includes personal stories and resources. <https://www.unchangedmovement.com/>
- As from February 14th 2017 the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement joined with Changing Attitude England to become OneBodyOneFaith and their

website is <http://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk>. The new OneBodyOneFaith website looks very positive, and I commend it.

- Diverse Church is a safe space for LGBTQ+ Christians <https://diversechurch.website/>.
- Queer Theology. Probably a bit more strident than some, so if you're easily offended, leave this one and move on to the next. Nevertheless, there is a lot of media resources which are worth investigating. Nevertheless, there is a lot of media resources which are worth investigating if you are keen to dig deeper. <http://www.queertheology.com>
- There seems to be a wealth of material at: <http://www.youth-suicide.com/gay-bisexual/links7a.htm>, which I haven't had time to delve into. The pages aren't as well laid out as some other sites, but they've probably simply got bogged down by the volume of information that's available, so if you are looking for something specific, you need to look a bit longer and you'll probably find it.
- Treatment of gays in American Christian schools - <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-hidden-war-against-gay-teens-20131010>
- Why 'God and the Gay Christian' Is Wrong About the Bible and Same-Sex Relationships. This is a critique, written by Christopher Yuan, of the book: 'God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships' by Matthew Vine listed below. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/june-web-only/why-matthew-vines-is-wrong-about-bible-same-sex-relationshi.html> It would counter much of what I have written, so from the perspective of balance it is worth a read – even if I don't agree!
- The story of the devout Mormon Josh Weed and his wife Lolly: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/frenchrevolution/2016/02/18/club-unicorn-gay-mormon-married/> and here: <http://joshweed.com> and here: <http://joshweed.com/turning-unicorn-bat-post-announce-end-marriage/> These pages are fascinating and illustrate from the inside the tensions involved in a mixed orientation marriage.
- Following Vicky Beeching's comments in 2014, where she admitted she was a lesbian to the Independent newspaper, many outlets worldwide wrote about the issue. Here they are collated on her own website along with many other press reports: <http://vickybeeching.com/lgbt/>
- In 2006, in response to well-documented patterns of abuse, a distinguished group of international human rights experts met in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to outline a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. The result was the Yogyakarta Principles: a universal guide to human rights which affirm binding international legal standards with which all States must comply. They promise a different future where all people born free and equal in dignity and rights can fulfil that precious birth-right. The principles may be viewed here, including the additional 10 principles that were added in 2017: <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles-en/>

- The 2017 additional 10 principles can be downloaded separately here: http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf
- <http://www.glaad.org/> Working to support and help LGBT+ people be accepted in all areas of life, including the media.
- <https://www.two23.net> To quote from their webpage: "Two:23 is a network of Christians, connected by LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) issues, who have discovered that God loves us just as we are. This realisation frees us to unashamedly include and encourage all to discover the love of God for themselves, pursue the call of Christ and live in a way that cherishes others just as God cherishes us."
Two23 is a reference to the Old Testament prophet Hosea, who, in chapter 2 verse 23, wrote: *I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say 'You are my God'.*

Mental Health:

If you know of reputable helplines, specifically LGBTQ+ affirming, please let me know.

- Switchboard (UK). Perhaps one of the oldest LGBTQ+ Switchboard helplines available for those needing help and advice – starting in London, but now UK wide – <https://switchboard.lgbt/>. "We have provided support and information to millions of people since our phone started ringing in 1974. Throughout our history, we have been at the forefront of supporting our communities in facing the issues of the day."
- Another Switchboard organisation, this time based around Brighton and Hove: <https://www.switchboard.org.uk/>. "Switchboard is a charity that has been listening to, supporting and connecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer communities since 1975. Originally a helpline, we have grown to deliver lots of additional services by and for LGBTQ people in Sussex."
- LGBT Helpline Scotland. <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/> Open Tuesday & Wednesday between 12 – 9pm, Thursday & Sunday 1-6pm. LGBT Helpline Scotland 0300 123 2523 Email: helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk
- LGBT Foundation, based in Manchester, but the reach seems to be national – <https://www.lgbt.foundation/helpline>. Advice Support & Information 0345 3 30 30 30.
- If you have a mental health issue and are looking for some help, contact The Shaw Mind Foundation, The Foundation Centre, Navigation House, 48 Millgate, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 4TS, United Kingdom. Read more about them at: <https://shawmind.org/our-mental-health-guides/>
- <https://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org>. This is a specifically Christian organisation whose stance on LGBTQ+ issues is once again, unclear, so *I cannot recommend them*, but other Christians hold them in high regard. They seem to be focussing on general mental health issues, and not conversion therapy, from what I can make out on their website. Their vision statement says:
We believe in a God who loves us AND cares about our emotional and mental health. Our faith and emotions are often kept separate. Mental

health is rarely discussed in churches and Christian spirituality is seen as having little to offer the world of psychology. We want to bridge that gap.

- To Educate: Sharing the best of Christian theology and scientific advances.

[Read More...](#)

- To Equip: Helping people meet with God and recover from emotional distress. [Read More...](#)

- To Encourage: Engaging with the local church and mental health services.

[Read More...](#)

Our core leadership team of a psychologist, a priest and a psychiatrist have developed high-quality, integrated resources and bring a powerful message that BOTH* are important.

* Presumably Christian spirituality and psychology – PJ

- **If you are in the United States** and are looking for help, because either, you have a mental health or substance abuse issue personally, or you know someone close to you with one, contact The Recovery Village. They have 24-hour helplines and email contact facilities. You can find further information here:

<https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/about/why-the-recovery-village/>

www.therecoveryvillage.com/resources/lgbtq/ or

www.therecoveryvillage.com/mental-health/news/finding-support-lgbt-community/.

- Again, if you are in the USA and are looking for mental health help, Advocacy, or support, please visit <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>. In the effort to protect LGBTQ youth from conversion therapy in every state of the nation and countries around the world, Trevor Project has launched [50 Bills, 50 States](#).

- There is also the [TrevorLifeline](#) which is a crisis intervention and suicide prevention phone service available 24/7/365 offered through the Trevor Project. If you or someone you love is seeking help please call 1-866-488-7386 or text "START" to 678678. Not available outside the USA.

There are some very uncomfortable statistics available on the site, which are eye-opening: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Introduction>.

In July 2021 Netflix released the film, "Pray Away" and with it they created a website with many resources (<https://www.prayawayfilm.com/resources>). I will reproduce the list here under their respective headings, but only those sites not already quoted above. These are principally based in the USA, but some are international:

Advocacy

Born Perfect (<http://bornperfect.org/>): The Campaign to End Conversion Therapy is a campaign of the National Center for Lesbian Rights focused on passing laws across the country to protect LGBT children and young people from the harm of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts. Born Perfect drafts, introduces and passes legislation, spreads awareness through public education, media, and advocacy, and empowers conversion therapy survivors and their families. If you'd like to get involved or share your story you can sign up here.

PFLAG (<https://pflag.org/>) is the first and largest organization for LGBTQ+ people, their parents and families, and allies. You can find PFLAG's webinars and their free training toolkit to assist people looking to take action in the effort to protect LGBTQ people from conversion therapy in all its forms here.

MAP's (https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/conversion_therapy) mission is to provide independent and rigorous research, insight and communications that help speed equality and opportunity for all. Their website includes up-to-date Equality Maps which include a state-by-state assessment on the current status of conversion therapy bans across the U.S.

LGBTQ Faith Organizations

The National LGBTQ Task Force's Institute for Welcoming resources (<http://www.welcomingresources.org/>) is an ecumenical group that aims to provide resources to facilitate a paradigm shift in multiple denominations whereby churches become welcoming and affirming of all congregants regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Transmission Ministry Collective (<https://www.transmissionministry.com/>) is an online community dedicated to the spiritual care, faith formation, and leadership potential of transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender-expansive Christians. If you are looking for support or are in need of virtual community you will be able to find that through TMC's text-based chat servers, video-based support groups, as well as their online Bible studies.

Support for Conversion Therapy Survivors

Conversion Therapy Survivors (<http://conversiontherapysurvivors.org/>) is an online group of people who have experienced reparative therapy, 'ex-gay' ministries, sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), aversion therapy, and other methods to understand or change our sexual orientation or gender identity. CTS exists to affirm our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identity as psychologically, spiritually, and relationally whole.

Beyond Ex-Gay (<https://beyondexgay.com/>) is an affirming online community and resource for those of us who have survived ex-gay experiences.

The Naming Project (<https://www.thenamingproject.org/>) is a Christian ministry serving youth of all sexual and gender identities. They provide a safe place for youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning or allied to learn, grow, and share their experiences. The Naming Project is a space in which youth can comfortably discuss faith and who they understand themselves to be and how they relate to God and the rest of the world.

Personal Addendum

There are a myriad of other sites, ones that I have quoted from, and ones I haven't. There is simply no way I can list everything that is useful. Go out and explore and engage your God-given critical faculties to discern what is helpful to you or those you are seeking to help. May you hear God's voice telling you how much He loves you, and values you, despite where you may currently find yourself,

or think you are. Don't turn away from seeking help. There are many people who have walked the path ahead of you and have found where to go, ask them. However, as a straight cisgendered male, I am in no position to give real advice, but will, and have, stood alongside those who are struggling when they need it.

Appendix - Additional Information.

In this section I have included additional information that I did not deem appropriate or relevant for the main document, but may nevertheless have some interest, alongside the pertinent chapter:

Chapter 2 – Scripture and/or Science.

Since publishing the second chapter, the BBC held it's LGBT+ History Month and featured the first NFL player to be openly LGBTQ+. (NFL is American Football to those outside the USA and stands for the National Football League).

His name is Ryan Russell and he has played for the Dallas Cowboys, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Buffalo Bills. However, it was only while out of the game due to injury that he came out as Bi-sexual. He is currently a free agent and hoping to get back, having recovered from his injury. If he succeeds, he will be the first openly LGBTQ+ player to play for the NFL. Others have come out after they finished their careers, but that is when they are likely to have reduced levels of antagonism and abuse. Ryan's story can be read and listened to hear:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/american-football/56100701>.

He describes the confusion of his college years. He knew he was different but really didn't know what it was. Being bisexual was simply not discussed or thought to be a thing. So much so that in the audio interview he says: "Literally in college I was like, am I turning gay? [I know] now that you don't turn gay - like that doesn't happen!"

In the text-based article, he said part of his "reluctance to come out was because of the view of bisexuality among certain parts of the LGBT+ community. Some people within that community believe being bisexual is just a route to being gay or lesbian". In addition, as part of the audio interview he tells us: "... why would I come out, if, you know, I might just marry a woman anyway? And then it just be like, you know, whatever... Like why did I make a fuss? Why did I put my career on the line and do all these things?" Ryan confirms some of the remarks I made in the chapter and reinforces my own personal view that there are likely to be many more Bi- folks than are currently known about. This is because if it can be hidden behind a straight relationship, and if you don't need to come out, then why would you? I feel certain that in the past if you were bi-sexual with the main bias towards the opposite sex, you wouldn't rock the boat, but if your bias was towards the same sex, you'd probably identify as gay. Nowadays, there is a bit more freedom of expression.

Chapter 5 – Transgender/Transsexual Issues and Intersex

Here are the stories of a few folks who have transitioned, whose stories are in the public eye.

The boxing promoter Frank Maloney started gender reassignment in 2013. Whilst I have no great love of boxing, I must admire the courage of someone going through this process in such a 'macho' sport - being so much in the public eye. The

hurdles that must be crossed, make it something you don't do for a laugh or a bet, but only if you have reached the end of your tether. Kellie Maloney as she has become, admitted it was a difficult decision to go public about the transition at the end of 2014. "Transitioning is a very hard thing and a very personal thing and I believe you've got to do it. Frank was a very unhappy person if I tell the truth".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/boxing/31549051>

In early June 2015, Channel 5 showed a documentary following Frank through his/her medical appointments as she became Kellie. Parts were quite grim, but it showed the personal cost to the whole family. It also showed the risks of surgery. At one stage, Kellie had a facelift, which went badly wrong and resulted in an admission to intensive care with her life under threat. The strain of coming to terms with their father's change of gender and the uncertainty of surgery was made very clear in interviews with his daughters – especially his eldest, who seemed to accompany him to most of his procedures having had to put her own family's life on hold while this went on. When someone goes through this transition process, there is a cost that must be paid, not just by the trans person, but by their whole family – and the possibility of things going wrong during treatment. So, no-one goes through it on a whim – it is an act of absolute desperation.

Let me give a couple more examples of people living a Trans lifestyle. In the US there is Bruce Jenner, who won the decathlon Olympic gold medal, at the Montreal games in 1976, and now goes by the name of Caitlyn Jenner. She has frequently appeared on TV, and has been interviewed by Piers Morgan. In a sense she has become a bit of a spokesperson for the Trans community.

Caitlyn is seen as the highest-profile American to come out as transgender. You can read more of her story at:

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/32461090/bruce-jenner-i-am-living-as-a-woman>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/33412685/caitlyn-jenner-i-have-totally-isolated-myself-from-the-transgender-community>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/33546849/as-far-as-evander-holyfield-is-concerned-caitlyn-jenner-is-still-bruce>.

We also have Renee Richards who was born as Richard Raskind and played tennis to Open standard both as a man and as a woman. Renee Richards had gender reassignment as long ago as 1975 at the age of 40, and her story is told here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33062241>

There are many, many more people one can read about. I'm trying to give a fairly broad sweep of folk in different areas and situations. One more example is the former cyclist Robert Miller who, at the peak of his career was 4th in the Tour De France, the highest placed British cyclist to that point. (Since then we've had Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome.) Robert Miller, from Glasgow, won the prestigious "King of the Mountains" title in that event. However, she is now

Philippa York and she transitioned over ten years ago, and her story is told on the BBC website here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-40946654>

I was recently told of a married couple who were featured in another TV documentary around March 2015, where the husband had, after many years decided to become a woman. Remarkably his/her wife remained, and in spite of the gender change, they remain in love. That raises all sorts of strange questions about the nature of the relationship: is it celibate, straight or lesbian? Does it really matter? Clearly their love transcends gender and sexuality. I didn't see the programme myself but wish I had, and I don't have enough specific information to investigate further, which is a shame, because it raises lots of interesting theological issues.

When you start using your favourite search engine to look for these stories, you find all sort of lurid situations. Another story was the transgender couple planning to tell their children in a few years' time that their father was actually their mother. Try getting your theological head around that! You'll always find challenging stories. On the other hand, there are plenty of other stories to shock you that involve straight people, so let's not get too exercised that every trans person is a walking scare story. The press is out there to sell copy, not to be sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of the victims, whether straight, gay/lesbian or trans, and we can all tell stories about how they distort the truth, and don't care if they hurt the people they write about. We don't write off all straight people because of a few lurid stories, neither must we write off trans folk, or we will have to explain ourselves to Jesus who died for these folk, as well as dying for us. Some of these trans folk will be our spiritual brothers and sisters. I now obviously see this as not just a theological issue, but also a social justice issue, and I believe Jesus does as well.

Chapter 9 – The “Clobber” passages - Leviticus

Earlier in the document, we saw the passage from Deuteronomy that required a rapist to marry his victim with no possibility of divorce.

Another law we have set aside is the one that stipulated that Levitical priests could only serve from 25yrs and retire at 50yrs old. No minister or priest retires at 50 these days – though I'm sure some would love to, but we say our life expectancy has moved on, and is different to the late Bronze Age culture of Moses day, when life-spans were shorter. Life spans seem to extend and shorten at various times in history depending on the prevailing conditions. After the flood God limited human life-spans to “three-score years and ten”. Anyway, Numbers 8 says:

²⁴ 'This applies to the Levites: men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, ²⁵ but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their usual duties and work no longer. ²⁶ They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites'.

In Exodus 12: 2, we are told that God told Moses that the month that included Passover was to be the first month of the year:

“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you”.

The Jews initially celebrated this from the 8th to mid-sixth century BC (sometime around the exile). Then we know from Ezekiel 40:1 that Rosh Hashana became the beginning of the New Year.

In the Orthodox Jewish Bible, that verse reads:

“In the five and twentieth year of our Golus, in the rosh hashanah [of Yovel (Jubilee)], in the tenth day of the month in the fourteenth year [573 B.C.E.] after the fall of the Ir [Yerushalayim] in the selfsame day the Yad Hashem was upon me, and brought me there.”

And the NIV reads:

*“In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, **at the beginning of the year**, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city on that very day the hand of the Lord was on me and he took me there.”*

Since then the Jews have not celebrated Passover (in the Jewish month of Nisan or Nissan) as the New Year, but Rosh Hashanah, which occurs in September or October (the month of Tishrei), when God is said to have created the world. Technically there are four Jewish New Years, three of which are associated with agriculture.

As a side issue, that sounds odd, but we have the calendar New Year, the Financial New Year and the Educational New Year (and that differs in different parts of the UK). So, I have a question: If, in a directly attributed quote, God commanded that Passover be used as the beginning of the year, why do Jews, and Evangelical Christians who hold to every word of Scripture as God-breathed, not observe it as such. It seems okay to set aside some things God says, and apparently not others.³¹

We seem to pick and choose which laws we follow and which we discard, and we make up good solid arguments for our decisions, but they aren't always very consistent with each other.

Perhaps I ought to do another brief detour here and talk about why we in Evangelical churches see some laws as standing for all time and others can be safely dismissed. Theologians see the Old Testament laws as falling within one of

³¹ Some of the background material relating to the New Year came from <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/the-history-of-rosh-hashanah-which-wasn-t-always-the-new-year-1.5301295>

three categories: moral laws, civil laws and ceremonial or ritual laws. We have already referred to a couple of these categories in earlier pages.

- Moral laws, especially if they are repeated in the New Testament, are seen as standing forever and written in stone, like the Ten Commandments.
- Civil law was what bound the Israelite nation together, but it is generally conceded that these laws no longer apply.
- Likewise, the ceremonial or ritual laws are also seen as no longer applying, as the whole sacrificial system has been superseded by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We are forgiven because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice – a sinless man dying for his beloved children.

Here are some helpful articles covering this in more detail:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2015/01/how-should-we-understand-the-law/> and <https://www.gotquestions.org/ceremonial-law.html>

In mentioning Jesus, we ought to make clear that Jesus came to fulfil the law, and in so doing he disregarded some laws, as saw in the main body of my essay. When asked: *'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'* Mark 12 reports:

²⁹ 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." ³¹ The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these'.

Given that in this section we are looking at a group of folks largely treated as lepers by the church, these commands of Jesus, to love God and your neighbour, ought to be regarded more deeply. Who is my neighbour? Go and read the story in Luke 10: 30-37. At the conclusion of his ministry here on earth, having taught about how to regard the Law, and how it can be set aside, Jesus told His disciples:

¹⁸ 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' Matthew 28

So, yes, Jesus came to fulfil the Law, but He never once advocated that we should follow it in every regard. He taught that where the Law brought harm, or stopped good from happening, it should be set aside, and He did that because He has all the authority of Heaven and Earth. The categories for regarding laws, sound very reasonable, nevertheless, it is important to note that the Bible doesn't make this distinction between its laws, it is simply a human device that enables us to understand what we can set-aside and what we can't. There will be some laws that have their feet in more than one category. There are others that some will regard as being in one category and others in a different category. As such, it perhaps can only be treated as a subjective guide.

As a case in point, some people will see the Leviticus references as being a moral law, and therefore applicable for all time, but to do that you have to know what was in Moses' mind (or whoever the scribe was), and why, and I would strongly argue that because the simplistic reading of these verses flies in the face of the character of God, and leaves a large element of doubt, you cannot make that judgement. Added to which, the fact that the verses can only stand if you appeal to this humanly constructed device (moral/civil/ceremonial), the result is very unsafe.

We have seen a few examples of the problems of translation. Frequently new converts to Islam will be motivated to learn Arabic to be better able to understand the Koran. Few Christians make any effort to learn Hebrew, New Testament Greek, or Aramaic. As lazy English speakers, in which I include myself, we are quite happy for someone else to do all the hard work of translation for us, and we rely on them. Occasionally there are translation difficulties, but we aren't equipped to solve them ourselves and must again rely on others. We all have a bias – we can't help it, it's part of being human – but our bias will mean we select the translation that best chimes with our world-view, and our sense and understanding of what God is like. You could make the point that you really can't completely trust the English translations of these passages. I don't mean they are worthless - they are not and can be an absolute treasure, but simply the fact that it is not in the original tongue, means it may not be exactly what the writer was trying to convey, and the translators must then give it their best educated effort. However, given that translators tend to be working for, and come from, the non-affirming evangelical publishing houses, it is unlikely that a version will be published that gives a different spin to the issue. Let's say a new Bible Version comes out, and we'll call it "The Infallible Version for Today," and they take a much more permissive line in these passages, maybe using as a source one of the alternative versions – one that draws more on the idea of it referring to shrine prostitutes, or those who commit sexual violence. Can you imagine the furore of the non-affirming Evangelical community? It probably wouldn't get published and if it did, it would be barred from most Christian bookshops and would never get used in more than a handful of churches. Some folks would buy it as a curio, but it is likely to be totally shunned by mainstream Christendom. As I mentioned in the final pages of the main document, the problem is that each of us has our own view, and we "know what the Bible says", and we know what we want the Bible to say and can't cope with anything else.

Chapter 10: The "Clobber" passages – Context and Other Passages

In a Huffpost article written by John Shore (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-shore/the-best-case-for-the-bible-not-condemning-homosexuality_b_1396345.html), the writer quotes from the Oxford Classical Dictionary, saying:

Here is what the OCD (third edition revised, 2003) says in its section about homosexuality as practiced in the time of Paul: "...the sexual

penetration of male prostitutes or slaves by conventionally masculine elite men, who might purchase slaves expressly for that purpose, was not considered morally problematic."

He also quotes another article from the Oxford Classical Dictionary, but I am quoting a fuller version where D. M. Halperin writes about homosexuality saying:

No Greek or Latin word corresponds to the modern term homosexuality, and ancient Mediterranean societies did not in practice treat homosexuality as a meaningful category of personal or public life. Sexual relations between persons of the same sex certainly did occur (they are widely attested in ancient sources), but they were not systematically distinguished or conceptualized as such, much less were they thought to represent a single, homogeneous phenomenon in contradistinction to sexual relations between persons of different sexes. That is because the ancients did not classify kinds of sexual desire or behaviour according to the sameness or difference of the sexes of the persons who engaged in a sexual act; rather, they evaluated sexual acts according to the degree to which such acts either violated or conformed to norms of conduct deemed appropriate to individual sexual actors by reason of their gender, age, and social status. It is therefore impossible to speak in general terms about ancient attitudes to 'homosexuality', or about the degree of its acceptance or toleration by particular communities, because any such statement would, in effect, lump together various behaviours which the ancients themselves kept rigorously distinct and to which they attached radically divergent meanings and values. (Exactly the same things could be said, of course, and with equal justification, about heterosexuality...)

In essence, he is saying that homosexuality wasn't recognised as an aberrant behaviour, it was all wrapped up in what it was to be human, and the ancients wouldn't understand the fuss we make about it, and it is entirely likely that if Paul were looking on at our society he wouldn't write against what we regard as homosexual behaviour, because he simply wouldn't recognise it.

Although this doesn't have anything directly to do with our issue, the following shows how different the standard social mores were at the time of Jesus and Paul – lest we automatically think that the way things are today mirror those at the time of Christ. We looked at Pederasty, but it is also interesting that within Greco-Roman culture, there were:

... the thousands of unwanted new-born babies who were thrown on to rubbish heaps (or "exposed" to use the modern scholarly euphemism); the boundary between contraception and infanticide was a blurred one, and disposing of children after birth was safer than getting rid of them before. Likewise overlooked are the young Roman girls, who were not uncommonly married by the age of 13 or 14, and sometimes even

earlier, into what we would have little hesitation in calling child abuse. How soon these marriages were consummated is anyone's guess, but Cicero's response, on the eve of his second marriage, to questions about why, in his 60s, he was taking as a bride a young virgin, a child in her mid-teens, is instructive. "Don't worry," he said, "she'll be a grown-up woman tomorrow" (that is, a virgin no longer). The ancient critic who quoted this answer thought that it was a brilliantly witty way of deflecting criticism, and held it up for admiration. We are likely to put it somewhere on the spectrum between uncomfortably coarse and painfully bleak – one powerful marker of the distance between the Roman world and our own.

- SPQR: A history of Ancient Rome by Professor Mary Beard

Talking of Infanticide, Wikipedia explains it further:

... the exposure of new-borns was widely practiced in ancient Greece, it was even advocated by Aristotle in the case of congenital deformity — "As to the exposure of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live." In Greece the decision to expose a child was typically the father's, although in Sparta the decision was made by a group of elders. Exposure was the preferred method of disposal, as that act in itself was not considered to be murder; moreover, the exposed child technically had a chance of being rescued by the gods or any passers-by. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infanticide#Greece_and_Rome

Professor Mary Beard makes the point that whereas today we argue whether life begins at conception, 20 weeks or whenever, in Roman times the baby was not recognised as a living entity even once born. Only when the father or group of Elders accepted it, was it regarded as living being, so until then, it could be discarded without problem.

In the documentary programme mentioned at the end of chapter 10, ('Roman Vice', by Dr Michael Scott, broadcast in 2017 on the History Channel) there was some description of infant exposure and it was mentioned that the ethos of the ancient Greeks was: "The life which nature has not provided with health and strength, can be of no use to itself and the state." Therefore, handicapped and sickly infants were disposed of without much ceremony, and indeed it was reported that in Athens, 10% of female babies were exposed, even though there was nothing wrong – other than being born female. The programme also quoted a comic writer around 300BC who wrote: "If you have a son, you keep him, even if you are poor, but if you have a daughter, you abandon her, even if you are rich." We tend to look back on history and assume that the people living at whatever stage of history we are interested in, applied the exact same standards and morals as we do – contemporary Western. But this is definitely not the case. Ethics and morals will differ in each and every culture and civilisation, so what we recognise in the UK will be different to China, and that will be different to India, etc. Religions tend to standardise behaviour somewhat, but we can't assume our standards match

those of days gone by, and we must keep that in mind when we read stories from scripture.

Whether this should have been retained in the original document, I chose to move it to this appendix. Although I have a tendency to try and anticipate every argument and get my retaliation/repudiation in first, I just felt it wasn't adding much to include these pages!