

A Biblical Response to the Question People Often Ask...

“How can you consider yourself a Christian
when you are also gay?”

by the Rev. Dr. Mel White

What the Bible Says—and Doesn't Say— about Homosexuality



Soulforce, Inc.

The person who has offered you this complimentary pamphlet is either a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender American OR a heterosexual friend or ally.

We have volunteered our time to go door-to-door with this important information because we are concerned about the continuing anti-homosexual campaign by religious leaders in our country.

You know how Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Dobson and the other fundamentalist televangelists use antigay rhetoric to create fear and anger among their listeners. For some mysterious reason, talking about gay Americans as both “sick” and “sinful” and a “threat to the family and society” has become a very effective way to raise money and mobilize volunteers.

Even though the nation's scientific community has concluded that homosexual orientation is a natural human variation (see the evidence inside), religious leaders still hang on to ancient prejudice using a few sentences from the Bible to justify their intolerance.

This pamphlet is a response to that kind of Biblical misuse. Thank you for accepting it from our Soulforce volunteers—and thank you in advance for taking a few minutes to read and ponder it. Let the Spirit of Truth use these words to bring hope and healing in your life or the life of someone you know and love.

Sincerely,



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LIKE YOU, I TAKE THE BIBLE SERIOUSLY!

Many good people build their case against homosexuality almost entirely on the Bible. I want to show as best I can that we gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christians take the Bible seriously, too. For example, I learned Hebrew and Greek to better understand the original words of the Biblical texts. I studied the life and times of the Biblical authors to help me know what they were saying in their day so that I could better apply it to my own.

I earned my master's and doctoral degrees at a conservative Biblical seminary to better equip myself to "rightly divide the word of truth." I've spent more than 50 years reading, studying, memorizing, preaching and teaching from the sacred texts. All I ask is that you consider what my research has taught me about those passages used by some people to condemn God's gay and lesbian children. Then, decide for yourself.

**"...rightly dividing the
word of truth."**

—II Tim. 2:15

MY FIRST PREMISE:

Most people have not carefully and prayerfully researched the Biblical texts used by some people to condemn God's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

As you know, Biblical ignorance has become epidemic in the United States. A recent study quoted by Dr. Peter Gomes in his *The Good Book* found that of 1,000 Americans polled, 38% were certain that the Old Testament was written a few years after Jesus' death and 10% thought Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Many people even thought that the epistles were the wives of the apostles.

Often even people who love and trust God's Word have not studied the particular Biblical texts carefully or prayerfully enough to prove or disprove their own assumptions. For example, they don't know that

- Jesus says nothing about same-sex behavior.

- The Jewish prophets are silent about homosexuality.
- There are just six or seven verses out of the Bible's million verses that refer to same-sex behavior in any way, and none of them refer to homosexual orientation as we understand it today.

Most people who are certain that they understand what the Bible says about homosexuality don't know where the six verses can be found. They haven't read them, let alone studied them carefully. They don't know the original meaning of the words in Hebrew or Greek. And they haven't tried to understand the historical context in which those words were written.

Yet the assumption that the Bible seems to condemn homosexuality has been passed down from generation to generation with very little personal study or research. The Apostle Paul says, "Test all things and hold fast to that which is good." Reading this little pamphlet shows that you are taking Paul seriously.

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

—1 Thessalonians 5:21

MY SECOND PREMISE:

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

Over the centuries people who misunderstood or misinterpreted the Bible have done terrible things.

The Bible has been misused to defend bloody crusades and tragic inquisitions; to support slavery, apartheid and segregation; to persecute Jews and other non-Christian people of faith; to support Hitler's Third Reich and the Holocaust; to oppose medical science; to condemn inter-racial marriage; to execute women as witches, and to support the Ku Klux Klan.

Shakespeare said it this way: "Even the devil can cite scripture for his purpose."



We should be able to assume that no person of good will would misuse the Bible to support his or her prejudice, but time and time again it has happened with tragic results.

In the 16th century, John Selden pointed at two Latin words—“*scrutamini scripturas*”—carved into a marble wall in an ancient church in Rome. “These two words,” he said, “‘*search the scriptures*,’ have undone the world.”

In one way, John Selden was right. Misusing the Bible has drenched the planet in blood and tears.

But in another way, he was wrong. Most people who misuse the Bible DON’T search the scriptures. They simply find a text that supports their prejudice and then spend the rest of their lives quoting (or misquoting) that text.

The texts used to condemn homosexuality and homosexuals are perfect examples.

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



Williams

Three years ago in the Shasta County jail, Matthew Williams explained to his mother why he and his brother, Tyler, murdered a gay couple, Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder, in their home near Sacramento, California. “I had to obey God’s law rather than man’s law,” he said. “I didn’t want to do this. I felt I was supposed to. I have followed a higher law... I just plan to defend myself from the Scriptures.”



Matson

Mowder

When Matthew Shepard was killed, a pastor in North Carolina published an open letter regarding the trial of Aaron McKinney that read: “Gays are under the death penalty. His blood is guilty before God (Lev. 20:13). If a person kills a gay, the gay’s blood is upon the gay and not upon the hands of the person doing the killing. The

acts of gays are so abominable to God. His Word is there and we can't change it."

Few of the people I know who say "The Bible condemns homosexuality" have ever studied carefully the Biblical texts used to condemn us. And fewer still have any idea that people are killing us quoting those same texts. I'm not writing this little pamphlet as a scholarly exercise. I'm pleading for the lives of my sisters and brothers who are rejected by their friends and families, fired by their employers, denied their civil rights, refused full membership in their churches, kill themselves or are killed by others on the basis of these six or seven texts.

MY THIRD PREMISE:

We should be open to new truth from Scripture. Even heroes of the Christian faith have changed their minds about the meaning of various Biblical texts.

Even when we believe the Scriptures are "without error," it's a risk to think our understanding is without error.

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

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

Even when we believe the Scriptures are "infallible" or "without error," it's a terrible risk to think that our understanding of every Biblical text is also without error. We are human. We are fallible and we can misunderstand these ancient words and misinterpret them—with tragic results.

Almost 1,000 people believed that Jim Jones was a faithful interpreter of God's Word. They died with him in the jungles of Guyana. I studied Jones and other cult leaders while writing the book and

documentary film, “Deceived.” The people who break free of the dangerous influence of Bible-quoting cultic gurus are people who take the Bible seriously enough to study the texts for themselves and make their own decisions about their meaning. The others “leave their bones in the desert.”

What would you say if someone asked you, “Could you be wrong about the way you’ve interpreted the Biblical texts used by some people to condemn homosexual orientation?” What does it say about you if you answer, “No. I could NOT be wrong.” I am asking you to re-examine these texts carefully, prayerfully—lives hang in the balance.



Anna

Mary Lou Wallner, now one of our most faithful Soulforce volunteers, was led by these texts to condemn her lesbian daughter, Anna, who hanged herself. Mary Lou now says, “If I can steer just one person away from the pain and anguish I’ve been living, then maybe Anna’s death will have meaning.” Mark B., another young man who accepted his sexual orientation “until he became a Christian,” understood from these texts that he couldn’t be both a Christian and a gay man, and he

wrote this suicide note to God: “I just don’t know how else to fix this.”

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

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

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

MY FOURTH PREMISE:

The Bible is a book about God.

The Bible is NOT a book about human sexuality.

The Bible is a book about God, about God’s love for the world and the people of the world. It is the history of God’s love at work rescuing, renewing, empowering humankind. It was never intended to

be a book about human sexuality. Certainly, you will agree.

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

Deuteronomy 22:13-21

If a bride is found not to be a virgin, the Bible demands that she be executed on the spot by stoning.

Deuteronomy 22:22

If a married person has sex with someone else's husband or wife, the Bible commands that both adulterers be stoned to death.

Mark 10:1-12

Divorce is strictly forbidden by the Bible in both testaments as is remarriage by divorcees.

Leviticus 18:19

The Bible forbids a married couple from having sexual intercourse during a woman's period. If they disobey, both man and wife shall be executed.

Mark 12:18-27

When a man died childless, his widow is ordered by Biblical law to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she bears her deceased husband a male heir.

Deuteronomy 25:11f.

If a man gets into a fight with another man and his wife intervenes to rescue her husband by grabbing the enemy's genitals, her hand shall be cut off and no pity shall be shown her.

I'm certain that you don't agree with the Bible on a lot of its teaching about sex. And you shouldn't. The Bible says clearly that sex with a prostitute for the husband is acceptable but not acceptable for the wife; polygamy (more than one wife) is acceptable; concubines for the king (acceptable), in Solomon's case, the wisest king of all, 1,000 concubines (acceptable); slavery and sex with slaves (acceptable); marriage for girls, ages 11–13 (acceptable); treatment of women as property (acceptable); inter-racial marriage (not acceptable); birth control (not acceptable); discussing or even naming a sexual organ (not acceptable); seeing your parents nude (definitely not acceptable).

Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has taught us that certain Biblical commands are no longer appropriate, wise or just. Often, the Holy Spirit uses science to teach us why those ancient commands no longer apply to our modern times.

During the last three decades, for example, organizations representing 1,500,000 American health professionals (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and educators) have said clearly that homosexual orientation is as natural as heterosexual orientation, a combination of yet unknown pre- and post-natal influences; and that it is dangerous and inappropriate to tell a homosexual that he or she could or should attempt to change his or her sexual orientation. (See Recommended Resources, p. 22–23.)

**“Homosexuality is not a
mental disorder and thus
there is no need for a cure.”**

**—THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**

And though there are examples of people who once perceived themselves to be homosexual who are living in heterosexual marriages, there are millions of homosexuals who have accepted their sexual orientation as a gift from God and live productive and deeply spiritual lives. The evidence from science and from our own personal experience should at least raise the same questions about the Biblical texts used to condemn us as the Biblical texts we no longer take seriously cited above.

MY FIFTH PREMISE:

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

So, let's ask two questions of these six texts: First, what does the text say about God that we might be missing? Second, what may (or may not) the text be saying about homosexuality? The following verses are used by some people to condemn homosexual relationships. Read them first to understand what they say about God, and second to understand what they might be saying about homosexuality.

PASSAGE 1 *Genesis 2:21-25* *The Creation Story*

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

I'm so tired of reading signs carried by protesters that

say: “It’s about Adam and Eve, not about Adam and Steve.” In fact, the creation story is as important to Adam and Steve as it is Adam and Eve. Whatever you think about homosexuality, gays and non-gays alike need to know and celebrate the truth at the center of this story.

This story is primarily about God, a story that the author included to show the power of God—God created the world and everything in it. We can also learn from this story that ultimately God is our Creator, that God shaped us, and said, “It’s good.” Isn’t this the heart of the text?

Now what does the creation story say about homosexuality? Some people think that because it is “natural” that a man and a woman together are necessary to create a new life, that gay or lesbian couples are “un-natural.”

They read that into the text even though the text is silent about all kinds of relationships that don’t lead to having children:

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

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

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

PASSAGE 2 *Genesis 19:1-14* *The Story of Sodom*

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

Often when Gary and I arrive at a college or a university to speak, there are protesters carrying signs that read, “Mel White, Sodomite.” (Has a nice ring to it.) Actually I’m not from Sodom. That city was buried



beneath the Dead Sea centuries ago. I'm from California but that just confirms their suspicions, I suppose.

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

Jesus and five Jewish prophets all describe the sins that led to the destruction of Sodom and not one of them mentions homosexuality. Even Billy Graham doesn't mention homosexuality when he preaches on Sodom.



In Ezekiel 16:48-49, the prophet says, "This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy.

They were arrogant and this was abominable in God's eyes."

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

There are a lot of gay folk who are Sodomites (and a lot of straight folk as well). Sodomites are rich and don't share what they have with the poor. Sodomites have plenty and want more. While millions go hungry and homeless, naked and sick, Sodomites rush to build bigger homes, buy bigger cars, and own more property, safer stock portfolios and more secure retirement accounts.

Whatever sexual truth you can get out of this passage, be sure to learn this central, primary truth about God as well. God has called us do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our Creator. Sodom was destroyed because the people there didn't take God seriously about the poor, the hungry, the homeless or the outcast.

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

It was common for soldiers, thieves and bullies to rape their fallen enemy to assert their victory and to dehumanize and demean the vanquished. This act of raping or

threatening to rape an enemy is about power and revenge, not about homosexuality or homosexual orientation. It is still happening.

In June 1999 on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, there was a photo of Abner Louima, the young black immigrant from Haiti who was held down in a restroom by officer Charles Schwarz while officer Justin Volpe rammed a broken stick into Louima's rectum. These two men and the three other officers who covered up this outrage were not gay. This was not a homosexual act. It was about power.



Louima

If Sodom is about gang rape, homosexuals oppose gang rape as much as anyone. That's why we believe that the story of Sodom says a lot about God's will for each of us and nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

PASSAGE 3 *The Verses from Leviticus*

Let's move on. What do the texts in Leviticus 18 and 20 say about God?

In Leviticus 20:13 you will read these words: "A man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be executed." On the surface, this could leave you feeling rather uneasy, especially if you are gay. But just below the surface there is an important truth about God that has nothing to do with sex.

Leviticus is a holiness code written 3,000 years ago. This code includes all those sexual laws we've already disagreed with and a lot more. It includes prohibitions against round haircuts, tattoos, working on the Sabbath, wearing garments of mixed fabrics, eating pork or shell fish, getting your fortune told, even playing with the skin of a pig. (There goes football!)

"Abominations" (TO'EBAH) are offensive behaviors in a certain time and place; something people in those times considered tasteless.

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

At 10, I signed a holiness code of the women's

Christian temperance union that I would never taste beer, wine or liquor because signing it would please God and my grandmother. That's a holiness code. When I was in high school we Evangelical Christians had a holiness code that went like this: "I don't drink, smoke, or chew or go with girls who do." I know what you're thinking. That last part about "girls who do" proved especially easy for me. The point is I obeyed that evangelical holiness code because my parents said those behaviors didn't please God, and I knew it didn't please them.

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

To the Jews an abomination was not a law, something evil like rape or murder forbidden by the Ten Commandments. It was a common behavior by non-Jews that Jews thought was displeasing to God.

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

But wait. First we ask, what does this text say about God? Even if the old holiness codes no longer apply to us as Christians, it's important to remember that in every age, people of faith are responsible for setting moral and ethical standards that honor God. More important, people of faith must be very careful not to include their own prejudices on that list.

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

Now, what do the Leviticus passages say about homosexuality?

I'm convinced those passages say nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today. Here's why.

Consider this single Biblical text that was used for centuries to condemn masturbation.

“He spilled his seed on the ground... And the thing which Onan did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also” (Genesis 38:9-10).

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

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

The Jews were a small tribe struggling to populate a country. They were outnumbered by their enemy. You can see why it was an abomination to even risk wasting one child, but the passage says nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

We’ve talked about the four passages in the Jewish text used (or misused) by some people to condemn sexual minorities. Let’s look at the three verses by the Apostle Paul that are used the same way in the Christian testament. First we ask what the text says about God, and second, what it may or may not say about sexual orientation.

PASSAGE 4 *The Verses in Romans*

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

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



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



Paul is writing this letter to Rome after his missionary tour of the Mediterranean where great temples were built to honor Aphrodite, Diana and other fertility gods and goddesses of sex and passion instead of the one true God that the apostle honors.

Apparently, these priests and priestesses castrated themselves, carried on drunken sexual orgies and even had sex with young temple prostitutes (male and female), all to honor the gods of sex and pleasure. The Bible is clear that sexuality is a gift from God. Our Creator celebrates our passion. But the Bible is also clear that when passion gets control of our lives, we're in deep trouble.

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

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

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

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

SMEDES: "The homosexuals I know have not rejected God at all; they love God and they thank God for His grace

and his gifts. How, then, could they have been abandoned to homosexuality as a punishment for refusing to acknowledge God?”

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

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

Thank you, Dr. Smedes. You can get a copy of this Soulforce video, “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy,” featuring Dr. Smedes, from www.soulforce.org.

Knowing a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person of faith will help you realize that it is unreasonable (and unjust) to compare our love for each other to the rituals of these priests and priestesses that pranced around the statues of Aphrodite and Diana. Once again, we feel certain that this passage says a lot about God and nothing about homosexuality as we understand it.

You’ll also note that Romans 2 begins with “Therefore, [referring to Romans 1], you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself...” Paul warns us that judging others is God’s business, not ours.

PASSAGES 5 AND 6 **I Corinthians 6:9 I Timothy 1:10** **The Mystery of “malokois” and “arsenokoitai”**

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

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

Like any good writer, Paul anticipates their first question. “Well, how are we supposed to treat each other?” Paul answers, “You know very well how to treat each other from the Jewish law written on tablets of stone.”



The Jewish law was created by God to help regulate human behavior. To remind the churches in Corinth and Ephesus how God wants us to treat each other, Paul recites examples from the Jewish law first. Don't kill each other. Don't sleep with another man's wife. Don't lie, or cheat, or steal. The list goes on to include admonitions against fornication, idolatry, whoremongering, perjury, drunkenness, revelry, extortion. He also includes “*malokois*” and “*arsenokoitai*.”

Here's where the confusion begins. What's a *malokois*? What's an *arsenokoitai*? Actually, those two Greek words—*malokois* and *arsenokoitai*—have confused scholars until this very day. We'll get to them later when we ask what the texts say about sex. But first let's see what the texts say about God.

After quoting from the Jewish law, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that they are under a new law, the law of Jesus, the law of love that requires *more* of us than not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to lie, cheat or steal. Paul tells them what God wants is not strict adherence to a list of laws, but a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a faith that isn't phony.

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

So, what do these two texts say about homosexuality? Are we on that list of sinners in the Jewish law that Paul quotes to make an entirely different point?

Greek scholars say that in first century the Greek word *malaokois* probably meant “effeminate call boys.” The new Revised Standard Version says “male prostitutes.”

Greek scholars don't know exactly what *arsenokoitai* means. And a good part of this tragic debate is that we don't know. Some scholars believe that Paul was coining a name to refer to the customers of “the effeminate call boys.” We

would call them “dirty old men.” Others translate it as “sodomites” and never explain what that means.

Then, in 1958, for the first time in history a person translating that mysterious Greek word into English decided that it meant homosexuals; when in fact there is no such word in Greek or in Hebrew. But at that time, a translator decided to make the decision for all of us that placed the word “homosexual” in the English-language Bible for the very first time.

In the past, people used Paul’s writings to support slavery, segregation and apartheid. People are still using Paul’s writings to oppress women, and to limit their role in the home, in church and in society.

Now, we have to ask ourselves, “Is it happening again?” Is a word in Greek that has no clear definition being used to reflect society’s prejudice and condemn God’s gay children?

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

Responsible homosexuals would join Paul in condemning those who use children for sex as much as they would join anyone else in condemning the threatened gang rape in Sodom or the behavior of the sex-crazed priests and priestesses in Rome. So, once again, I am convinced that this passage says a lot about God and nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

MY SIXTH PREMISE:

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

After we’ve looked closely at those six Biblical texts used by some people to condemn homosexuality, we are reminded that Jesus, the Jewish prophets and even Paul never even comment on the responsible love a gay man or lesbian feels for another.

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

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

In 1864, almost 3,000 years after Moses and at least 18 centuries after the Apostle Paul, the German Karl Heinrich Ulrichs was the first social scientist to declare that homosexuals were a distinct class of individuals.

This is a big moment for sexual minorities, for all of us. It's our Columbus discovering the New World. It's our Madame Curie discovering radium used for X-rays. It's our Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. It may seem like one small step for the rest of you, but it's one giant leap for us.

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

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

According to Dr. Ulrichs, what looked "unnatural" to Moses and Paul was in fact "natural" to homosexuals.

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

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

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

MY SEVENTH PREMISE:

The prophets, Jesus and the Biblical authors say nothing about homosexual orientation as we understand it today. But, they are clear about this one thing. As we search for truth, we are to “Love one another.”

In conclusion, we may not be able to use the Bible as our final authority on sexual orientation, but as we search for the truth, we can use the Bible as our final authority on how we should treat each other along the way.

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

“This is my commandment,” Jesus said, “that you love one another, as I have loved you.” On this the Bible is explicitly clear. Even if we disagree about what the Bible seems to say about homosexuality, we can agree that above all else we are commanded by the Scriptures to love God and to love each other.

Since God is the God of truth, since Jesus himself told us that the truth would set us free, to love God and to love each other is to seek the truth about sexual orientation wherever we can find it.

There is a growing mass of evidence from science, psychology, history, psychiatry, medicine and personal experience to make my case that the verdict is in, that homosexuality is neither a sickness nor a sin. Unfortunately, the church has always been slow, if not the last institution on earth, to accept new truth.

In 1632 Galileo, a scientist (and a man of faith) dared to support the radical 15th century idea of Copernicus that all planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun. Immediately, Galileo was proclaimed a heretic by the Pope who quoted Scriptures in his attempt to disprove what science was proving.

Earlier, Protestant heroes joined in quoting Scriptures condemning Copernicus. These weren't evil men. But they couldn't admit that the Bible was a book about God, not about astronomy. Just like good men and women today have trouble admitting that the Bible is a book about God, not about human sexuality.

Martin Luther said, “This fool Copernicus wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred scripture in Joshua 10:13 tells us that Joshua com-



Luther



Calvin

manded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.

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



Melancthon

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

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

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

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

Instead, they are using passages from the Bible that may not even pertain to sexual orientation, as we understand it, to drive their own children away.

MY EIGHTH PREMISE:

Whatever some people believe the Bible seems to say about homosexuality, they must not use that belief to deny homosexuals their basic civil rights.

To discriminate against sexual or gender minorities is unjust and un-American.

Please consider one last thing. I love the Bible. I read God’s word

in it and hear God's word through it. But this is not a nation governed by the Bible. Ours is a nation governed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Its laws were created to protect our individual right to disagree. If the Bible (or someone's view of the Bible) replaces the Constitution as the law of the land, we undermine the great foundation upon which this country was built.

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

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

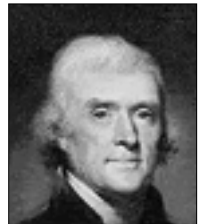
I hope we can agree that all of us must stand together against those who would replace the Constitution with Biblical law. That's why, when I lecture on a university campus, I carry a Bible in one pocket and a Constitution in the other.

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

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

I hope you'll agree that we are family, sisters and brothers of the same heavenly parent. We may be different but we can still live together in peace.

Thanks for reading this pamphlet. I'm grateful. If you are interested in learning more, I've listed a few resources on the next few pages. You can also find resources online at our web page, www.soulforce.org.



Jefferson

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

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books

What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality by Daniel Helminiak, Ph.D.
Homosexuality and the Christian Faith edited by Walter Wink, Ph.D.
Steps To Recovery From Bible Abuse by the Rev. Dr. Rembert S. Truluck

Visit your local bookstore to find these titles.

Videotape

Homosexuality & the Bible

Featuring the Rev. Ken Martin, pastor, MCC Austin, Texas. Professor Martin's understanding of these passages, his humor and gifts as a communicator bring new truth to life with solid Bible teaching. To order this video, e-mail your mailing address to RevKMartin@aol.com or visit www.soulforce.org.

Organizations

Church leaders who believe sincerely that homosexuality is "a choice" ignore decades of scientific research and the testimonies of millions of homosexuals who have accepted their sexual orientation and live their lives among us. Church leaders who insist that homosexuals can and should "change" base their claim on the personal testimonies of a few men and women still in the process of "reparative therapy."

The important fact about "reparative therapy," also sometimes known as "conversion" therapy, is that it is based on an understanding of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major health and mental health professions. In short, the majority of mental health professionals in the United States are agreed that "...homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a 'cure.'"

For more information see *Just the Facts on Sexual Orientation and Youth* online at the web site of the American Psychological Association [www.apa.org] <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html>.

For the individual statements warning of the dangers of "reparative" or "conversion" therapy contact:

HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

American Academy of Pediatrics
 Div. of Child and Adolescent Health
 141 Northwest Point Blvd.
 Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
 (847) 228-5005
 www.aap.org

American Counseling Association
 5999 Stevenson Avenue
 Alexandria, VA 22304-3300
 (703) 823-9800
 www.counseling.org

American Psychiatric Association
 1400 K Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20005
 (202) 682-6097
 www.psych.org

American Psychological Association (APA)
 LGB Concerns Office
 750 1st Street, NE
 Washington, DC 20002-4242
 (202) 336- 6041
 www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/

Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists (AGLP)
 4514 Chester Avenue
 Philadelphia, PA 19143-3707
 (215) 222-2800
 www.aglp.org

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
 4340 East West Highway #402

Bethesda, MD 20814
 (301) 657-0270 x223
 www.naspweb.org

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
 Nat'l Committee on LGB Issues
 750 First Street, NE, Suite 700
 Washington, DC 20002-4241
 (202) 408-8600
 www.socialworkers.org

American Medical Association
 Child and Adolescent Health
 515 North State Street, 8th Fl.
 Chicago, IL 60610
 (312) 464-5315
 www.ama-assn.org

American Association of School Nurses, Inc.
 P.O. Box 1300
 Scarborough, ME 04070-1300
 (207) 883-2117
 www.nasn.org

EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
 1801 North Moore Street
 Arlington, VA 22209
 (703) 528-0700
 www.aasa.org

American Federation of Teachers
 Human Rights & Community Relations Department
 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20001-2079
 (202) 879-4434
 www.aft.org

American School Health Association (ASHA)
 7263 State Route 43
 P.O. Box 708, Kent, OH 44240
 (330) 678-1601
 www.ashaweb.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
 121 West 27th St., Suite 804
 New York, NY 10001
 (212) 727-0135
 www.glsen.org

National Education Association
 Human & Civil Rights
 1201 16th Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20036-3290
 (202) 822-7700
 www.nea.org

National School Boards Association (NSBA)
 1680 Duke Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314
 (703) 838-6756
 www.nsba.org/schoolhealth

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
 1101 14th St. NW, Suite 1030
 Washington, DC 20005
 (202) 638-4200
 www.pflag.org

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM SOULFORCE

Order at www.soulforce.org or clip and mail the coupon below

BOOK:

Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America

by the Rev. Dr. Mel White. First Edition hardback \$23 Paperback \$15

VIDEOTAPES:

Homosexuality: The Debate is Over. The Verdict is In. Not a Sickness! Not a Sin! (50 min. \$25.)

The most recent Biblical, medical, psychiatric, psychological, and scientific evidence is presented to combat the myths and lies often used against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons by anti-gay religious leaders and institutions. Hear the evidence and decide for yourself!

How Can I Be Sure That God Loves Me, Too? (24 min. \$15.)

Videotaped live before an amazing congregation in Spring Lake, Michigan, this is the Rev. Dr. Mel White's response to those who would misuse the Biblical record to condemn God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children. This is a dramatic retelling of the story of Jesus for our sisters and brothers who have forgotten (or who have never heard) how much God loves them.

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (29 min. \$15.)

"Why Romans 1 cannot be used to condemn God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children." Featuring the Rev. Dr. Lewis B. Smedes, Biblical scholar and ethics professor.

ORDER DIRECT FROM SOULFORCE

- Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America**
First Edition hardback \$23 Paperback \$15
- Homosexuality: The Debate is Over. The Verdict is In.
Not a Sickness! Not a Sin! (Video) 50 min. \$25
- How Can I Be Sure That God Loves Me, Too? (Video) 24 min. \$15
- There's A Wideness in God's Mercy (Video) 29 min. \$15

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Soulforce is an interfaith movement committed to ending spiritual violence perpetuated by religious policies and teachings against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

We teach and apply the nonviolent principles of M.K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

For Soulforce Alerts,
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Write "subscribe" in the subject line.

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