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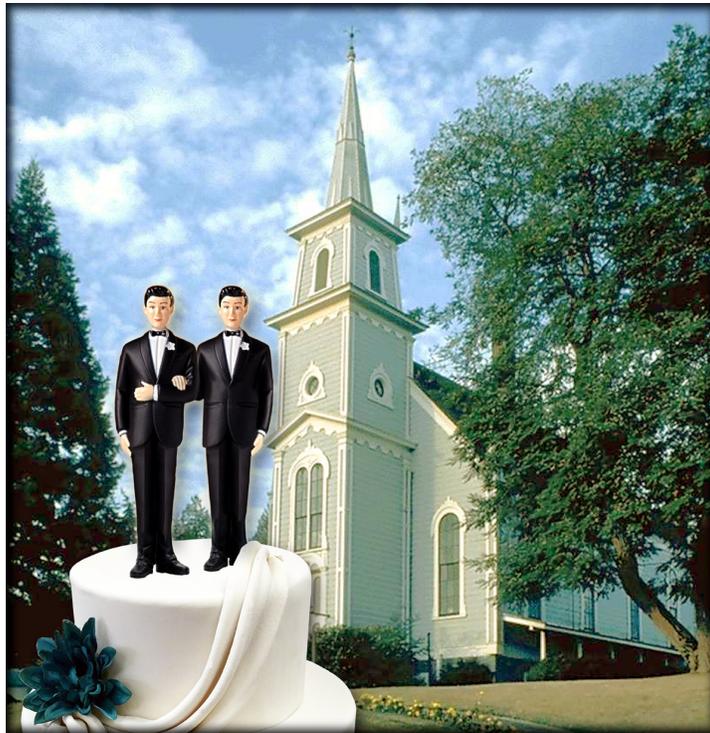
## Homosexuality

### The Pressing Issue Facing the Church

by Gary E. Gilley

In 1979, the well-known evangelical theologian, philosopher, and apologist Francis Schaeffer astutely observed:

“The thinkables of the eighties and nineties will certainly include things which most people today find unthinkable and immoral, even unimaginable and too extreme to suggest. Yet — since they do not have some overriding principle that takes them beyond relativistic thinking — when these become thinkable and acceptable in the eighties and nineties, most people will not even remember that they were unthinkable in the seventies. They will slide into each new thinkable without a jolt.”<sup>1</sup>



can culture. In light of shifting values concerning abortions, Schaeffer predicted similar devolution in other moral areas. Would he be surprised by today’s approval and promotion of all things homosexual? What was considered throughout most of human history as sinful behavior and, until 1961, declared a crime in every American state, and more recently labeled as a psychological disorder,<sup>2</sup> is now being embraced by people from all walks of life — including Christians.

“State sanctioned” homosexual marriage, which was unimaginable not long ago, and as recently as 2012 banned in 32 states, is now  
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In the wake of the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, Schaeffer was here addressing issues such as abortion. Abortion, which previously had been recognized as evil, was at the time rapidly finding acceptance in Ameri-

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# Editorials

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## SATAN AND SMALL IDEAS

It is amazing what Satan can do with a small idea — especially when that tiny thought is coupled with man’s sinful imagination. Even a truth can be pressed to such extremes that it becomes error.

The Apostle Paul tells us to “take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). This means that we are to have our minds immersed in Scripture and have a biblical worldview while we discern all of life through the lens of the Word of God. We are to be on the offensive against error.

Even positive ideas that are unbiblical and unrealistic are of no value and can lead us astray. People can live in unreality and delusion believing a small lie.

Mitch Horowitz has traced the unseen and largely unknown origins and roots of both positive thinking and Word-Faith theology in his recent book, *One Simple Idea, How Positive Thinking Reshaped Modern Life*. Positive thinking and Word-Faith were spawned in the muddy mix of 19th-century New Thought.

What was called New Thought gave birth to Christian Science and a host of other positive-affirmation cults and is the ancestor of numerous modern errors spewing from our television sets and falsely called Christianity. In that dream world we are to always be healthy and wealthy. However, reality never really matches the illusion.

Horowitz’s book is a detailed well-documented history of all the key players in the New Thought movement. He connects the dots between New Thought, Mary Baker Eddy, Norman Vincent Peale, New Age thinking, the Law of Attraction, and numerous Word-Faith teachers. And Horowitz is not bashful about naming names; he lists Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, and many more. (The 14-page index in his book helps enhance the retrieving of names and topics.)

Men like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) taught that conjuring up mental ideas of a more positive tone could help us make it so. In other words, thought was so powerful it could create or change reality. Creation, in fact, is the prerogative of God, not man. That simple fact escaped Emerson.

Horowitz explains positive thinking in this way: “The principle of positive thinking is simplicity itself. Picture an outcome, dwell on it in your thoughts and feelings, and unseen agencies — whether metaphysical or psychological — will supposedly come to your aid. Seen in this way, the mind is a causative force. ... the content of our thoughts influences the nature of our experience, in concrete terms” (pp. 4, 5).

James speaks of a man concentrating and focusing on what he wishes to accomplish, that is, he conjures up mental pictures of what he wishes to happen and the prosperity he wishes to gain (James 4:13). That man is  
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### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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## TBN MATRIARCH DIES

Jan Crouch died May 31, less than a week after suffering a massive stroke. She was 78.

When it was first announced that Crouch had suffered a life-threatening stroke, her family asked for “miracle healing prayers,” but word also spread that her recovery was “unlikely.”

Crouch, together with her late husband Paul, founded the Trinity Broadcasting Network, which now lays claim as “the world’s largest Christian television network.” Their religious media empire was birthed in 1973 when the couple began renting air time from an independent UHF television station in Southern California. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker also were a part of TBN’s inception, but moved to North Carolina in 1974 and eventually launched their own network. According to its website, “TBN now reaches every major continent via 78 satellites and more than 18,000 television and cable affiliates worldwide.”

TBN has long been a platform for heretical teachers and in the dissemination of aberrant theology, including the prosperity teaching. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, told *The New York Times*, “TBN has been a huge embarrassment to evangelical Christianity for decades.”

Paul Crouch died in 2013 after suffering from chronic heart problems.

—MKG

## “GOSPEL OF JESUS’ WIFE” PAPYRUS DISPUTED

In September 2012, Karen L. King, a Harvard University divinity professor, captured the attention of academics attending the International Congress of Coptic Studies when she revealed the “Gospel of Jesus’ Wife,” a business-card-sized papyrus scrap. On this tiny papyrus were the words, “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife,’” and was followed by “she is able to be my disciple.”

King explained that while the artifact was not to be taken as evidence that Jesus was married, she stood firm that the document was authentic; her confidence was based upon two expert papyrologists saying it was ancient. Now she’s not so sure.

In a recent issue of *Atlantic* magazine, it is reported that journalist Ariel Sabar believes the papyrus is fake. Sabar

tracked the artifact to its previous owner, Walter Fritz, and in so doing unearthed “a warren of secrets and lies.” A *History Channel* report says there are inconsistencies in how and when Fritz first acquired the document. Adding suspicion is Fritz’s questionable background and character. He is known to have run pornographic websites. Fritz, however, strongly denies that he forged the papyrus.

According to the *History Channel*, “After reading the article and learning of the apparent fabrications in regards to the provenance of the papyrus, King conceded to the *Atlantic* that the fragment is likely fake. She admitted that she never investigated Fritz’s background or tried to authenticate the supporting documents he provided about the supposed origin of the papyrus.”

*The Boston Globe* reported that “King said she did not think a retraction of her academic paper was warranted, because she had allowed for the possibility of forgery and her conclusions were based on what she knew at the time. ‘I don’t see anything to retract,’ she said.”

Despite the fanfare that King received when the papyrus was first unveiled, most scholars had regarded it as a fraudulent document even prior to the revelations by *Atlantic* magazine.

—MKG

## CHRISTIAN DATING WEBSITE FORCED TO INCLUDE GAYS

Homosexual-rights advocates have scored another victory in advancing their agenda by way of an anti-discrimination lawsuit against ChristianMingle.com, a popular Christian dating website. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, “Two gay men filed class-actions claims against Spark Networks Inc. in California courts in 2013 alleging that ChristianMingle.com and several other sites in the company’s portfolio of niche dating services excluded users looking to meet singles of the same sex.”

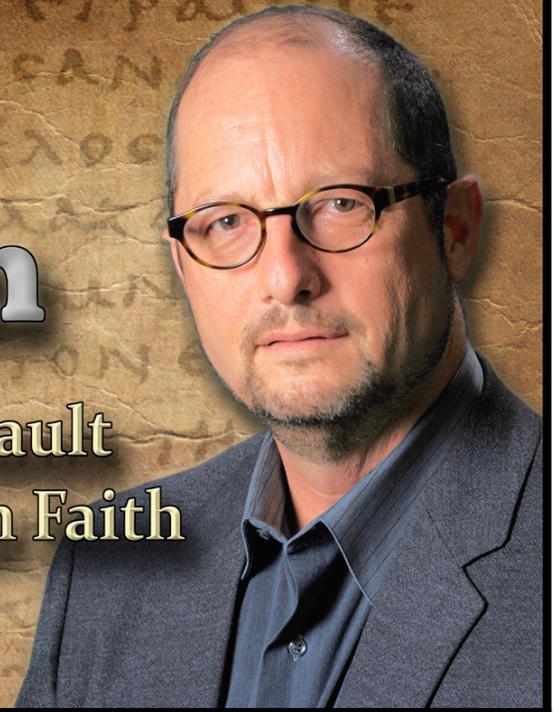
According to a report in the *Christian Examiner*, “The men alleged the site ‘arbitrarily and intentionally’ excludes gays and lesbians from participation on the site — a violation, they claimed, of California’s Unruh Civil Rights Act, which requires ‘business establishments’ to offer equal services to clients regardless of their sexual orientation.”

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# Marketing Skepticism

## Bart Ehrman's Continued Assault on the Bible and the Christian Faith

by J. Greg Sheryl



Attacks on the Bible and Christianity are nothing new. From the second-century pagan philosopher Celsus to contemporary so-called "Christian" ministers such as John Shelby Spong, the world has never lacked for those who question the faith. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, there has been a long litany of men (and women) who have launched a bitterly critical frontal assault attacking God, the Bible, and the Christian faith.

Among the latest is Bart D. Ehrman, an agnostic New Testament scholar who did his undergraduate work at Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College and was immersed in evangelical Christian culture for many years. He currently teaches full-time at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in its religion department.

### RE-INTRODUCING BART EHRMAN<sup>1</sup>

A recent book responding to some of Ehrman's claims says:

"As far as biblical scholars go, Bart Ehrman is a rock star. Ehrman is full-time professor at the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill and adjunct professor at Duke University. ... Ehrman's website<sup>2</sup> lists four books written in the last ten years that have made it on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list."<sup>3</sup>

Ehrman has written a number of both scholarly-level and popular-level books. He rose to fame in popular culture through the publication of his 2005 book, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*.<sup>4</sup>

Ehrman gives his "anti-testimony" at the beginning of *Misquoting Jesus*.<sup>5</sup> He portrays himself as a Christian who abandoned his belief in biblical inerrancy after one of his seminary professors challenged it. Ehrman says that he continued to be "a completely committed Christian"<sup>6</sup> for a number of years after this. In the paperback edition of *Misquoting Jesus*,<sup>7</sup> which contains material not present in the original hardback edition, and in a subsequent book,<sup>8</sup> he states that the issue that led him to abandon his faith altogether was the problem of human suffering. He states, "The problem of suffering became for me the problem of faith."<sup>9</sup>

In a more recent book, Ehrman states, "I am an agnostic with atheist leanings, and my life and views of the world would be approximately the same whether or not Jesus existed. My beliefs would vary little."<sup>10</sup>

### WHAT MAKES EHRMAN DANGEROUS

Ehrman denies having any agenda behind his teaching. He has written, "I certainly never intended to lead anyone away from the Christian faith."<sup>11</sup> And toward the end of this same book, which is a wholesale attack on the Christian faith, he states:

"Some readers will find it surprising that I do not see the material in the preceding chapters as an attack on Christianity or an agnostic's attempt to show that faith, even Christian faith, is meaningless and absurd. That is not what I think, and it is not what I have been trying to accomplish."<sup>12</sup>

The fact that Ehrman recognizes that some readers would come to this conclusion demonstrates his awareness that his book comes across as just such an attack. Further, one page

earlier (after Ehrman explains a short written assignment he gives his students at the end of the semester) he observes:

“Their responses, as you might imagine, are extraordinarily broad-ranging. A few students will argue ... that there are no contradictions in the Bible, that Paul and Jesus were preaching exactly the same thing, and so on. Not many students will argue this (though they certainly would have done so at the beginning of the semester), because they have seen the evidence and they know that there are historical problems with the New Testament.”<sup>13</sup>

In a 2015 blog he wrote, entitled “False Rumors (or lies?) About My Teaching,” Ehrman again takes issue with the idea that he is trying to disabuse anyone of their Christian faith. In answering a question someone submitted to him as to whether or not, in his classes, he was trying to convince students to leave the Christian faith, Ehrman responded, in part:

“I am not opposed to Christians and have never been opposed to Christians. Ever. I have never tried to deconvert my students. Ever. I have never tried to destroy my students’ faith. Ever. This is just false. The only question is if someone for some reason innocently thought it was the case, even though it’s not, or if someone intentionally made it up in order to slander me. That is to say: is it an erroneous rumor or a mean-spirited attack. I don’t know and have no way of knowing.”<sup>14</sup>

However, there are reasons to believe that Ehrman is being disingenuous. For instance, contrary to those assertions, Denver Seminary New Testament professor Craig Blomberg has succinctly written regarding Ehrman:

“The general tenor of most of [Ehrman’s] publications and talks makes it clear that he wants to help disabuse people of whatever

Christian faith they have as often as he can. *Some of his former students have told me that he has said as much in class.*”<sup>15</sup>

Or consider what Christian apologist Lee Strobel has written regarding Ehrman’s book, *Misquoting Jesus*:

“The issues [Ehrman] raises in his book are now challenging the faith of others. Here’s the text of an email that I received: ‘Please help me. I have just read Bart Ehrman’s book *Misquoting Jesus*. I was raised in the church and I’m now 26 years old. This book has devastated my faith. I don’t want to be kept in the dark; I want to know what really is going on in the Bible and what I should believe, even if it goes against what I’ve believed since I was a little boy. *Is Ehrman correct?*’”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, *all* seven of the popular-level Ehrman books mentioned in this article contain blatant, skeptical assaults on the Bible and the Christian faith. They are poisonous for both Christian and non-Christian consumption, because their intended effect seems to be to produce skepticism and doubt concerning Christianity and the Bible. Strobel’s above example graphically illustrates this.

Christian scholar Michael F. Byrd further shows why Ehrman is dangerous:

“He also has a global audience. In fact, ... on two occasions I’ve received emails from Christians in the Middle East asking how to respond to local Muslims who have been reading Ehrman’s writings and are quoting them at Christians as evidence that the Christian Bible has been corrupted, and that Islam is the only religion with a pure set of sacred writings. So there is more at stake here than being the resident religious skeptic on the Colbert Report — much more!”<sup>17</sup>

In a 2009 debate between Ehrman and Christian apologist James White, Ehrman acknowledged his awareness that Muslims use his writings, but excused this, saying:

“I do know that [Muslim apologists] use my work; and I’m sorry if people don’t appreciate the fact that they use my work; but it’s not really my fault; I haven’t given my work to anybody; I simply write the books and let people read the books.”<sup>18</sup>

Later in this same debate, White pushed back against Ehrman’s attitude toward Muslim apologists (and others) using his works to debate Christians by stating, in part:

“A few weeks ago, I debated Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, an Islamic scholar and apologist at Duke University. The subject was a comparison of the Bible and the Qur’an. Two of the four books on Dr. Shah’s desk were by — Bart Ehrman. At one point, Dr. Shah informed us that all we had for the New Testament were ‘copies of copies of copies.’ I had to smile [because White recognized this argument was directly taken from Ehrman]. If you listen to men like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens,<sup>19</sup> you will often hear Dr. Ehrman’s name cited as *the* final authority in the scholarly demonstration of the corruption and utter unreliability of the New Testament. I don’t think either man really has a clue what Bart is actually talking about; but that does not stop them from invoking his authority.”

“A few years ago, my daughter ran into an anti-Christian zealot teaching in the Phoenix area: Lee Carter, who, in the midst of giving the highly scholarly advice to Google, the authorship of the Gospels, invoked Dr. Ehrman’s name as part of his anti-Christian diatribe, as well. I do not believe Dr. Carter has any meaningful understanding of the field of textual criticism [Ehrman’s specialty], but he is representative of many in academia today who are more than happy to blast the New Testament and smugly proclaim to 18-year-olds that scholars have proven it to be an unreliable document.”

“Bart Ehrman cannot control the use of his words. As far as any of these have misused his comments, the responsibility lies with them. But the fact is that Dr. Ehrman has had many opportunities to correct these misapprehensions and strangely he doesn’t. I have listened to NPR interviews where the interviewer was going *on and on and on*. Instead of correcting their many misapprehensions, Dr. Ehrman allows them to go on unchallenged.”<sup>20</sup>

### POPULAR-LEVEL BOOKS WRITTEN BY EHRMAN

To observe how hostile to Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith that Ehrman’s popular-level books are, one need only read their titles:

1. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005).

**Implication:** The Bible has been changed, at least as far as the words of Jesus go. Inside my book is the real scoop.

2. *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question — Why We Suffer* (2008). **Implication:** The Bible is defective, in that it doesn’t even answer the most basic and pressing question of why there is human suffering.

3. *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don’t Know About Them)* (2009). **Implication:** The Bible contains subtle contradictions, and you’re being kept in the dark about them. Inside my book is the real scoop about them.

4. *Forged: Writing in the Name of God — Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2011). **Implication:** The Bible’s books were written by authors who pretended to be people that they weren’t.

5. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (2013). **Implication:** Jesus wasn’t really God; He was a common preacher who was artificially elevated to the position of Deity.

All of these titles have appeared on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list.

His latest book is called, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (2016).<sup>21</sup>

**Implication:** The early Christians misremembered and created the stories about Jesus.

One could sum up Ehrman’s message as: “You can’t trust the Bible. It has been changed. It contains contradictions that have been hidden from you and the biblical authors aren’t even the people they are represented as being. Furthermore, the early Christians invented the stories about Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament. And Jesus wasn’t really God. He was a Jewish preacher who erroneously became deified.”

Ehrman’s stance toward Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith is inimical and adversarial. Judging from his work, he appears to be doing the very thing he denies. Who is misleading whom when Ehrman continues to author book after book attacking Jesus and the Bible; and he is very aware that those who are hostile to the Bible, Jesus, and Christianity use his books to undermine the faith of Christians. If he truly doesn’t *intend* to lead people away from Christianity, he should, at the very least, stop writing such works, and cease the publication of those already in print; and he should also repent for the damage that he *has done*, and is knowingly *doing*, to the cause of Christ.

The Bible speaks of people like Ehrman when it says:

“For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain” (Titus 1:10-11, NASB).

The *New Living Translation* renders verse 11:

“They must be silenced, because they are turning whole families away from the truth by their false teaching. And they do it only for money.”

Likewise, Christian scholar Mike Licona, in a 2009 debate with Ehrman, said:

“And what about any book that’s written against the traditional view of Jesus today? You make a mint on these kinds of things. Bart has certainly made a boatload from his.”<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the money he makes from promulgating his skepticism to a non-scholarly and biblically-untrained populace (including his students), Ehrman appears to enjoy the fame and reputation he gains by being the scholarly “bad boy” of New Testament studies. He also likely wants to gain adherents to his skeptical views, and make more doubters and agnostics like himself. If he were honest with himself, he probably believes that all people should adopt what he considers the scholarly, sophisticated views of the Bible, Jesus, and Christianity that he has embraced. Ehrman has come to liberate the masses from their ill-founded faith in Jesus and the Bible (despite his disclaimers above).

One wonders what would happen if Ehrman wrote a book denigrating Islam, Muhammed, and the Qur’an in the same manner in which he has attacked Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible.

And by the way, you have to pay to participate in Ehrman’s blog, although he states that he gives all the proceeds from his blog subscriptions to charity.<sup>23</sup>

### REFLECTIONS ON EHRMAN’S POPULAR-LEVEL BOOKS

Because Ehrman is a scholar, and has a large and effective platform to proclaim his views, and because he is a skillful and interesting communicator, in both written form and orally, he is able to influence many: Non-Christian and Christian. For all these reasons (and more), he is dangerous to the Christian faith.

Arguably, Ehrman’s most devastating blast against all things Christian is his book, *Jesus, Interrupted*. It is a frontal assault on the Bible being God’s Word. It contains some of the

same subject matter presented in his previous — and no doubt, future — books, as well as majoring on his belief that the Bible contains irresolvable contradictions, making biblical inerrancy an impossible view for knowledgeable people — that is, the people who read and believe his book — to hold.

The book's first chapter is titled, "A Historical Assault on Faith." Ehrman writes how "historical criticism" is changing man's view of the traditional Christian faith. One theological dictionary defines "historical criticism" as:

"An approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to understand the Bible in light of its historical and cultural backgrounds, that is, as a book arising out of a human context. Historical criticism uses a variety of methods to determine what actually happened in history 'before,' 'behind' or 'under' the text rather than seeking a 'divine' meaning in the text itself. Although helpful to an extent, *the primary criticism leveled against historical criticism is that it tends to downplay Scripture as a divine book and instead overemphasizes its humanness.*"<sup>24</sup>

In *Jesus, Interrupted*, Ehrman writes:

"[P]erhaps pastors are afraid that if the person in the pew learns what scholars [historical critical scholars like Ehrman] have said about the Bible, it will lead to a crisis of faith, or even the loss of faith. My personal view is that a historical-critical approach to the Bible does not necessarily lead to agnosticism or atheism. ... It is true that historical criticism did more or less shatter my evangelical views of the Bible."<sup>25</sup>

The so-called historical criticism of the Bible that Ehrman promotes is, in reality, "biblical vandalism."<sup>26</sup>

F. David Farnell, explains:

"Historical Criticism *a priori* denigrates the Scriptures, especially — though not exclusively

— in the area of the supernatural. The question is not whether Historical Criticism challenges the Bible's historical accuracy, but when and in what manner or degree it does so."<sup>27</sup>

### EHRMAN'S EVISCERATED BIBLE

Nearly all of Ehrman's popular-level books include assertions that the Bible contains mistakes, discrepancies, and contradictions. Ehrman has a low view of the Scriptures, viewing them as a very fallible human book:

"It is a radical shift from reading the Bible as an inerrant blueprint for our faith, life, and future to seeing it as a very human book, with very human points of view, many of which differ from one another and none of which provides the inerrant guide to how we should live. This is the shift in my own thinking that I ended up making, and to which I am now fully committed."<sup>28</sup>

In his book, *Forged*, Ehrman contends that the Apostle Paul only wrote seven of the 13 letters that are normally attributed to him (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon).<sup>29</sup> He believes that these seven Pauline letters are nearly the only books of the New Testament that are correctly attributed to those whom we normally identify as their authors. The implication is clear: If nearly all the books of the New Testament weren't written by apostles or associates of apostles, as has been believed by most of the Christian Church for the centuries since the time the books were written, then the authority of the New Testament vanishes. This is precisely the implication that Ehrman hopes you will draw from this book.

Buried within one of the book's endnotes is an admission by Ehrman concerning the authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul's pastoral epistles, whose Pauline authorship Ehrman denies:

"As is true of everything I talk about in this book — as is true,

in fact, for virtually anything any biblical scholar talks about — there are differences of opinion even here."<sup>30</sup>

Ehrman doesn't state this vital admission in the actual *text* of his book — somewhere near the beginning. Instead he relegates it to an obscure endnote that many of the book's readers will likely never even see.

In *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman seeks to convince readers that there were significant changes made in the text of the New Testament by scribes who were copying the text. In regard to this, numerous critiques of this specific popular-level assault by Ehrman on the Christian Scriptures have already been written and are referred to in the endnotes.<sup>31</sup>

In his latest book, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, Ehrman states that the period between the year Jesus died and the time the first Gospels were written was between 40-65 years.<sup>32</sup> He tries to persuade his readers that the Gospels that were then written must have suffered from the faulty memories, false memories, and invented memories of their authors. Ehrman writes:

"Each person in that link of memory from Jesus to the writers of the Gospels was remembering what he or she had heard. Or trying to do so. When it comes to knowing about the Gospels and about the historical Jesus himself, it is all about memory. And about frail memory. And faulty memory. And false memory."<sup>33</sup>

Ehrman promotes rampant skepticism and doubt in the book as to the interval between the time of Jesus' death and the time the first Gospels about His life were written. Elsewhere in the book, he writes:

"How can we use the later memories of Jesus to the [sic] establish facts of his life, the things that he actually said and did? Were details changed here and there when they were being circulated by word of mouth? Were stories changed drastically? Were some invented? In short, were some early Christian

memories of Jesus frail? Or faulty? Or even false? If so, can we determine why the memories of Jesus's life and death came to be changed over the course of time?"<sup>34</sup>

Ehrman specifically disbelieves that the four Gospels in the New Testament — which are, as he correctly points out, anonymous — were written by the authors who have been associated with them for most of Church history. He writes:

"The reality is that these persons [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John] were almost certainly not the authors of these Gospels, which were first circulated without any names attached. The assignment of apostolic authors to the accounts came only a century or so after they were written."<sup>35</sup>

It would certainly seem reasonable to believe that those who lived "only a century or so after they [the Gospels] were written" would have a better assessment of who wrote the Gospels than would someone twenty centuries removed from them, like Ehrman.

New Testament scholars Darrell Bock and Daniel Wallace give reasons for (especially) Mark being the author of the Gospel that bears his name.<sup>36</sup> They write:

"First, [Eugene] Boring [who argues against Mark's authorship of the Gospel that is associated with his name] never makes it clear why the gospel came to be tied stubbornly to someone named Mark. ... The stubbornness of Mark's tie to this gospel suggests the work of an old tradition, not the creation of a second-century figure like Papias. Second, Boring ignores or is unaware of evidence from Justin Martyr, another mid-second-century writer who speaks of [the apostle] 'Peter's memoirs' as he cites a text that is unique to Mark, found in 3:16-17.<sup>37</sup> ... This means that Papias, who may well have spoken the view in the early part of the second century, is not

alone among the early figures in making this association."<sup>38</sup>

They further argue:

"Martin Hengel, former professor of New Testament at the University of Tubingen, Germany, has argued that the titles tied to the Gospels have an excellent likelihood of going back to the end of the first century or the early part of the second century."<sup>39</sup>

As for the memories of the apostles, Ehrman would surely disbelieve what Jesus assured them in the Upper Room the night before His death, when He said:

"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:25-26).

This promised divine assistance is our guarantee from Jesus that what the apostles remembered was indeed accurate!

Near the end of this book, Ehrman asserts, "The historical Jesus did not make history. The remembered Jesus did."<sup>40</sup> And on the last page of the book, he states, "History was changed, not because of brute facts, but because of memory."<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the miracles of Jesus recorded in the New Testament, Ehrman rhapsodizes:

"[I]f these stories are not historically accurate, does that rob them of their literary power? Not in my books. They are terrifically moving accounts. Understanding what they are trying to say means understanding some of the most uplifting and influential literature the world has ever seen."<sup>42</sup>

Basically, for Ehrman's readers, it doesn't really matter whether or not the miraculous events recorded actually happened, because, regardless of whether or not they did, they are

good literature. However, for him as a historian, he would argue that whether or not they actually happened does matter. For all others, they should just revel in the good literature of the miracle stories of the New Testament — it's simply good inspirational literature, regardless of its facticity.<sup>43</sup>

## EHRMAN'S EVISCERATED JESUS

Ehrman's "Jesus" is on a plane so low as to be unrecognizable from the New Testament portrait. Ehrman's Jesus is emphatically a different Jesus from the Jesus of the New Testament. Ehrman presents his ideas of who Jesus was in two of his recent popular-level books, *Did Jesus Exist?* and *How Jesus Became God*.

Ehrman *does* acknowledge a historical person named Jesus. He points out in his Introduction to *Did Jesus Exist?* that it is relatively common knowledge that Jesus existed.<sup>44</sup> However, he doesn't believe much of what the four Gospels teach about Him. So, this proclamation of Jesus having lived 2,000 years ago in Palestine is hardly a triumphant profession of faith. As he further states in his Introduction to *Did Jesus Exist?*, "The reality is that whatever else you may think about Jesus, he certainly did exist. That is what this book will set out to demonstrate."<sup>45</sup> And, "From a dispassionate point of view, there was a Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>46</sup>

While we might initially be glad that Ehrman repeatedly asserts in this book that Jesus existed, the reader should ask, "Which Jesus?"

In his book, *How Jesus Became God*, Ehrman tries to school the reader on how it was that such an unlikely person as Jesus "became" God.

Ehrman writes:

"[I]t simply is not true that I never had a personal relationship with Jesus. Quite the contrary: Jesus and I were very close, and for many years. He was my daily companion, comforter, guide, and teacher, as well as my Lord and Savior."<sup>47</sup>

## THE SEARCH FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Ehrman seems to have embraced what theologians refer to as “the search (or quest) for the historical Jesus,” which one source defines as “An attempt in the latter part of the nineteenth century to determine precisely what the historical Jesus said and did.”<sup>48</sup> Actually, the definition above refers to “the first quest” for the historical Jesus. As stated by one dictionary:

“Beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the present, with some starts and stops, there has proceeded a movement called the quest for the historical Jesus, an attempt to recover by objective historical inquiry the so-called Jesus of history, who is presumed to have been distorted by church dogma.”<sup>49</sup>

Regarding the term, “historical Jesus,” another source states that it is:

“A reference to the person of Jesus as he can be understood and investigated using the tools and methods of modern approaches to the study of history. The ‘historical Jesus’ is often contrasted with ‘the Christ of faith,’ that is, the Jesus that is honored and preached about by the Christian church. *In using these terms, it is often assumed that there is a gap between what can really be known about the historical person, that is, Jesus as he actually existed, and the Jesus proclaimed by the apostles as recorded in the NT documents.*”<sup>50</sup>

And, as noted by one author, “It is, however, unlikely that any historical portrait will not in some ways reflect the ‘faith’ of the historian constructing the portrait.”<sup>51</sup> We will see below that this statement is certainly true in the case of the “Jesus” discovered by Ehrman’s quest.

### JESUS ACCORDING TO EHRMAN

To illustrate Ehrman’s denigration of the one whom he claims to have

once embraced as His Lord and Savior, here is how Ehrman introduces Jesus in his book:

“Jesus was a lower-class Jewish preacher from the backwaters of rural Galilee who was condemned for illegal activities and crucified for crimes against the state. Yet not long after his death, his followers were claiming that he was a divine being. Eventually they went even further, declaring that he was none other than God, Lord of heaven and earth. And so the question: How did a crucified peasant come to be thought of as the Lord who created all things? How did Jesus become God?”<sup>52</sup>

Ehrman’s answer to his questions he posed above is that:

“Belief in Jesus’s resurrection changed absolutely everything. Such a thing was not said of any of the other apocalyptic preachers of Jesus’s day, and the fact that it was said about Jesus made him unique. Without the belief in the resurrection, Jesus would have been a mere footnote in the annals of Jewish history. With the belief in the resurrection, we have the beginnings of the movement to promote Jesus to a superhuman plane. Belief in the resurrection is what eventually led his followers to claim that Jesus was God.”<sup>53</sup>

Ehrman later states:

“There can be no doubt, historically, that some of Jesus’s followers came to believe he was raised from the dead — no doubt whatsoever. This is how Christianity started. If no one had thought Jesus had been raised, he would have been lost in the mists of Jewish antiquity and would be known today only as another failed Jewish prophet. ... For Jesus’s disciples, Jesus was raised into an immortal body and exalted to heaven where he currently lives and reigns with God Almighty.”<sup>54</sup>

However, Ehrman states, “As an agnostic, I personally do not believe Jesus was raised from the dead and so I do not believe he ‘appeared’ to anyone.”<sup>55</sup> This raises the question of what sort of a “personal relationship” could Ehrman have had with a dead man?

In one place, Ehrman says this about who he thinks Jesus *was* — not *is*, because he doesn’t believe Jesus rose from the dead:

“I started out thinking of Jesus as God the Son, equal with the Father, a member of the Trinity; but over time, I began to see him in ‘lower and lower’ terms, until finally I came to think of him as a human being who was not different in nature from any other human being. The Christians exalted him to the divine realm in their theology, but in my opinion, he was, and always had been, a human.<sup>56</sup> As an agnostic, I now think of Jesus as a true religious genius with brilliant insights. But he was also very much a man of his time.”<sup>57</sup>

Also, for Ehrman, the Jesus he believes existed didn’t say some of the things the New Testament reports that He said,<sup>58</sup> was not the subject of such well-known Messianic prophecies as Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9:26,<sup>59</sup> was not born of a virgin,<sup>60</sup> was an apocalyptic prophet who was mistaken about God’s plans for the future,<sup>61</sup> and so forth. He states:

“Jesus was mistaken about [God’s plans to bring cataclysmic judgment and His coming kingdom on the earth]. He was mistaken about a lot of things. ... Jesus was a man of his own time. And just as all men and women of their own time are wrong about so many things, so too was Jesus. And so too are we.”<sup>62</sup>

Ehrman’s eviscerated Jesus is simply an apocalyptic prophet and a teacher, but *only* a man — and a dead man, at that! Hardly the One who has inspired worship and devotion in millions down through the ages and for whom some have given their lives,

either in living Christian service or in death as martyrs. The Jesus of Bart Ehrman is clearly and emphatically “another Jesus” from the One proclaimed by the apostles of our Lord and the early Church (see 2 Corinthians 11:4).

### A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF EHRMAN’S “JESUS”

In a scholarly critique of Ehrman’s book, *How Jesus Became God*, Michael F. Bird wrote, “On a divine-human spectrum, Ehrman has a low view of Jesus. ... Suffice to say, Ehrman’s view of Jesus is low, so low in fact that it could probably win a limbo contest against a leprechaun.”<sup>63</sup> If New Testament translator J.B. Phillips — who also wrote the book, *Your God Is Too Small* — were alive today, he might well write a book responding to Ehrman titled, *Your Jesus Is Way Too Small!*

In his fictional satire, *The Screwtape Letters*, Christian apologist C.S. Lewis pictures the senior demon, Screwtape, admonishing his nephew demon, Wormwood:

“[We must] encourage once again the conception of a ‘historical Jesus’ to be found by clearing away later ‘accretions and perversions’ and then to be contrasted with the whole Christian tradition. In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a ‘historical Jesus’ on liberal and humanitarian lines; we are now putting forward a new ‘historical Jesus’ on Marxian, catastrophic, and revolutionary lines. The advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every thirty years or so, are manifold. In the first place they all tend to direct men’s devotion to something which does not exist, for each ‘historical Jesus’ is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to; each new ‘historical Jesus’ therefore has to be got out of them by suppression at one point and exaggeration at another, and by that sort of guessing (*brilliant* is the adject-

ive we teach humans to apply to it) on which no one would risk ten shillings in ordinary life, but which is enough to produce a crop of new Napoleons, new Shakespeares, and new Swifts in every publisher’s autumn list.”<sup>64</sup>

Regarding the quest for the historical Jesus, evangelical theologian R.C. Sproul wrote:

“Rigorous academic attempts have been made to get behind the New Testament portrait of Jesus, to discover the ‘real’ historical Jesus. These attempts to penetrate the wall of history, to peek behind the veil of the so-called primitive apostolic witness, have taught us much about the prejudice of the scholars but have added little or nothing to our understanding of the real Jesus. What the scholars discovered behind the veil was a Jesus created in their own images according to their own prejudices. ... To search behind or beyond the New Testament is to go on a snipe hunt equipped with the flashlights of pride and prejudice.”<sup>65</sup>

The historical Jesus *is* the Christ of faith. To discover the historical Jesus, one need go no further than the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. The Jesus revealed in the Bible is *identical* with the historical Jesus — not something created by unbelievers like Ehrman.

### EVALUATING EHRMAN AND HIS WORKS

Ehrman’s popular-level works are dangerous to Christians. Not everything he says is bad or wrong. However, the good in his work is laced with the dangerous poison of his virulent skepticism.

Just as one would avoid walking in a bad part of town at night for their own safety, Ehrman’s work should be avoided by Christians who want to live fruitful and victorious Christian lives and not get devoured by biased, skeptical scholarship. Ehrman has *nothing* to contribute to one’s Chris-

tian life. Even his book *Did Jesus Exist?* answers a question that he himself admits is generally acknowledged by all except a minority of radical skeptics who could be compared to flat-Earthers or Holocaust-deniers. But it is as laced with as much skepticism as any of his other books. Ehrman’s eviscerated Jesus is *not* the Jesus of the New Testament or the early Christian Church. Christians have nothing to gain from Ehrman’s works — and potentially much to lose — regarding their Christian faith and their relationship with the Lord.

### EHRMAN’S REPEATED ASSERTIONS OF BIBLICAL DISCREPANCIES

A common refrain in Ehrman’s popular-level works is his assertion that the Bible contains irreconcilable discrepancies and contradictions. Obviously, to one who believes this is so, it isn’t difficult to find things that, on the surface, appear to be discrepancies or contradictions. However, were he to use the same diligence and effort that he has devoted to skeptical scholarship to try to find solutions to those verses that seem to him to be discrepancies and contradictions, Ehrman might well find explanations for many of the things in the Bible which he labels discrepancies and contradictions and which have been based on his *a priori* assumptions — that is, theoretical deduction rather than empirical observation.

Anyone who seriously studies the Bible will come across noticeable difficulties or apparent contradictions within the pages of Scripture. Ehrman gave up his belief in biblical inerrancy and later, due to his inability to make sense of the plight of human suffering, he even gave up his belief in God. But there is an alternative to jettisoning belief in biblical inerrancy upon discovering something in the Bible that appears to contradict something else in the Bible or something that appears to be an error. One need not assume that there isn’t a solution to your Bible difficulty, even if you cannot think of one at the moment. Pray and ask the Lord to show you the resolution.

The late William Arndt, a seminary professor of New Testament exegesis and hermeneutics, wrote:

“[We make] a plea for fairness in the treatment of alleged discrepancies. Fairness demands that, when we meet two seemingly contradictory statements in an author, we do not exaggerate the differences, but that we make an honest endeavor to harmonize them. The a priori assumption must always be that the author has not contradicted himself. This rule is observed in dealing with secular authors. What pains, for instance, have not editors taken to bring about agreement between seemingly conflicting statements in the writings of Plato! The principle by which they were guided was that no contradiction must be assumed unless all attempts at harmonizing fail. That is in accordance with the dictates of fairness. Let the same amount of good will be manifested in the treatment of the difficult passages in the Bible, and the charge that it contains irreconcilable discrepancies will no longer be heard. The Word of God is entitled to at least the same consideration as the works of human authors. Furthermore we must be careful here lest we fall into shallow, superficial ways of reasoning. Often two seemingly contradictory statements are found, after a little scrutiny, to be in perfect harmony. It is of utmost importance that a person be guided not by first impressions, but be willing to make a thorough study of the case in question.”<sup>66</sup>

Denver Seminary New Testament professor Craig Blomberg states:

“From at least the second century onward Christians have been well aware of the similarities and differences among the four Gospels and have offered a variety of explanations for both minute apparent discrepancies and broad, varying emphases.

The same is true for the seeming dissonance *within* a wide variety of passages in both Testaments, either with each other or with information from outside of Scripture. Not a single supposed contradiction has gone without someone proposing a reasonably plausible resolution.”<sup>67</sup>

At least two previous articles in *The Quarterly Journal* have addressed the issue of biblical difficulties.<sup>68</sup> There are tools available to help students find answers to some of these questions. Study Bibles, such as the *NIV Study Bible* or the *ESV Study Bible*, may contain a study note in the text that might help with your question. There are also specific books that specialize in answering seeming discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible. Two of the larger such works are the *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*<sup>69</sup> and *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*.<sup>70</sup> There are also numerous other works dealing with Bible difficulties.<sup>71</sup> Concerning difficulties specifically in the Gospels, I have listed three works in the endnote below.<sup>72</sup> A final tool that can be used in mining answers to Bible difficulties is stated thus by Blomberg:

“[F]or all possible questions, the most detailed evangelical commentaries on individual books of the Bible are necessary. See esp. the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, *New International Commentary*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary*, *New American Commentary*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, *Expositor’s Biblical Commentary Revised*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, and *Pillar New Testament Commentary series*.”<sup>73</sup>

### A SCRIPTURAL EVALUATION OF EHRMAN

Ehrman has made a good living off marketing biblical skepticism. He has used the intelligence, good communication skills, and scholarly abilities God has given him and turned them against his Creator and the One who redeemed him (see 2 Peter 2:1).

The Apostle John warned of those who oppose Christ and His kingdom, saying of these seducers:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).

Whether or not Ehrman ever had a real relationship with Jesus, we cannot know for certain. However, according to the above verse, the path he has traveled since then seems to weigh against his ever having actually been a Christian.

In Scriptural terms, Ehrman is a “scoffer” (2 Peter 3:3) or “scornful” (Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 1:22). The Bible states, “A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it” (Proverb 14:6a). The reason a scoffer doesn’t find wisdom is because his very attitude of scoffing prevents him from receiving wisdom.

Ehrman calls himself “an agnostic with atheist leanings.” The Scripture declares, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” (Psalm 14:1a; 53:1a; cf. Romans 1:22). The Scripture declares that God has made Himself known through his works (Psalm 19:1-4), rendering man without excuse (Romans 1:18-22).

The Bible further states:

“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself” (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

### A CLOSING PASTORAL EXHORTATION

Despite being cleverly and devastatingly presented, don’t be deceived or

misled by Ehrman's skepticism. The Bible says:

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:8-10).

Scripture also exhorts:

"Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23).

Don't sell the truth of the Bible's divine authorship and the full deity and humanity of Christ for the cheap scholarly worthless substitute that Ehrman hawks. It is your faith that unites you to Christ, and by which you are able to live a victorious and triumphant Christian life. Don't let Ehrman steal your faith with his skepticism and doubts and so rob you of your walk and your vital relationship with Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:2-4).

In Ehrman's writings, we hear the hiss of the serpent saying, just as he said to Eve in the Garden, "Has God indeed said..." (Genesis 3:1) and then when we entertain the doubts he supplies through Ehrman the serpent again denies the Word of God, just like he did with Eve so long ago. In *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman writes, "Occasionally I see a bumper sticker that reads: 'God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.' My response is always, What if God *didn't* say it?"<sup>74</sup>

Secondly, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7, NASB; cf. 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Thirdly, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become

partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12-19).

The Scripture teaches that, "The just shall live by faith" (see, for instance, Habakkuk 2:4b; Romans 1:17b; Galatians 3:11b; Hebrews 10:38a). That's why it's so important to hold onto your faith and not to let the devil, through Ehrman, steal it from you (see 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

Finally, we need to be praying for Bart Ehrman. The Bible says:

"But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

May the Lord thus grant Bart Ehrman repentance unto life and repudiation of his doubt and unbelief.

#### Endnotes:

1. There have been two previous articles in *The Quarterly Journal* dealing with Ehrman. See G. Richard Fisher, "The Misguided and Misleading Teachings of Bart Ehrman," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2006, pp. 5-13; and J. Greg Sheryl, "Interrupting Bart Ehrman: Responding to a Contemporary Apostle of Doubt," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2010, pp. 4-16. (The latter article was an abbreviated version of the small self-published book, Greg Sheryl, *A Chris-*

*tian Minister Responds to Bart Ehrman.*)

2. The website of Bart D. Ehrman may be accessed at: [www.bartdehrman.com/](http://www.bartdehrman.com/).

3. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Darrell L. Bock, and Josh D. Chatraw, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014, pg. 1. (A simplified version of the material in this book is Andreas Köstenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters: Confident Faith in a Confusing World*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.) For anyone who wants further help regarding Ehrman's attacks on the Bible and the Christian faith, I highly recommend one or both of these books. The four books referred to by Köstenberger, Bock, and Chatraw in the quotation above are Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*; *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question — Why We Suffer*; *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*; and *Forged: Writing in the Name of God — Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*. (A fifth book which has appeared on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list, since the quote above, is Ehrman's *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee.*)

4. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. New York: Harper One, 2005.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-14. For a summary of his abandonment of a belief in biblical inerrancy, as recorded in *Misquoting Jesus*, see either "The Misguided and Misleading Teachings of Bart Ehrman," *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6 or "Interrupting Bart Ehrman: Responding to a Contemporary Apostle of Doubt," *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

6. Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question — Why We Suffer*. New York: Harper One, 2008, pg. 3.

7. *Misquoting Jesus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.

8. *God's Problem*, *op. cit.*, for example, pp. 2-16.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

10. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Harper One, 2012, pg. 5.

11. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*. New York: Harper One, 2009, pg. 185.

12. *Ibid.*, pg. 271.

13. *Ibid.*, pg. 270.

14. Bart Ehrman, "False Rumors (or lies?) About My Teaching," *The Bart Ehrman Blog: The History & Literature of Early Christianity* online post dated Feb. 9, 2015. Accessed at: <http://ehrmanblog.org/false-rumors-or-lies-about-my-teaching/>.

15. Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe*

the Bible? Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2014, pg. 14, emphasis added.

16. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007, pg. 69, italics in original.

17. Michael F. Bird, Craig A. Evans, Simon J. Gathercole, et. al, *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014, pg. 7.

18. "Bart Ehrman vs. James White Debate P[art]2," 48:56 timemark. Video accessed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2Mp4v8VQwQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2Mp4v8VQwQ). The website informs that the debate was "on the question 'Did the Bible Misquote Jesus?' This debate took place at the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, Sheraton Airport Hotel on January 21, 2009," and was based on Ehrman's book *Misquoting Jesus*.

19. Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are known for their aggressive atheism. Dawkins is still alive, but Hitchens died in 2011.

20. "Bart Ehrman vs. James White Debate P[art]2," op. cit., 54:05 timemark, italicized portions indicate White's oral emphasis.

21. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior*. New York: Harper One, 2016.

22. "Bart Ehrman vs. Mike Licona 2009 Debate," 1:11:33 timemark. Video accessed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iE6YX9O5tE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iE6YX9O5tE). The website informs that the debate topic was "Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?" and that "This debate took place at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. on April 2nd, 2009. The two previously debated the same topic a year earlier at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary."

23. *The Bart Ehrman Blog: The History & Literature of Early Christianity*. Accessed at: <http://ehрманblog.org/>. He elaborates about his for-pay blog in *Jesus Before the Gospels*, op. cit., pp. 298-299.

24. Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999, pg. 59, s.v., "historical criticism," emphasis added.

25. *Jesus, Interrupted*, op. cit., pp. 272-273.

26. I am indebted to evangelical theologian R.C. Sproul for this phrase.

27. Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism Into Evangelical Scholarship*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998, pg. 96, italics in original.

28. *Misquoting Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 13.

29. Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God — Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*. New York: Harper One, 2011, pg. 93.

30. *Ibid.*, pg. 278, note 10.

31. In addition to "The Misguided and Misleading Teachings of Bart Ehrman,"

op. cit., and among the many books and articles that could be recommended critiquing *Misquoting Jesus*, I suggest the following: Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* By Bart Ehrman" (document accessed at: [www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-2/JETS\\_49-2\\_327-349\\_Wallace.pdf](http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-2/JETS_49-2_327-349_Wallace.pdf)); *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*, op. cit., pp. 79-106; Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007, pp. 35-76); and *The Case for the Real Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 65-100.

32. *Jesus Before the Gospels*, op. cit., for example, pp. 1, 2, 11, 15, 57, 65, 70, 78, 81, 102.

33. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

34. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.

35. *Ibid.*, pg. 128.

36. *Dethroning Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 223-227.

37. Bock and Wallace cite for this sentence Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985, pg. 50).

38. *Dethroning Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

39. *Ibid.*, pg. 225, citing Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, op. cit., pp. 64-84.

40. *Jesus Before the Gospels*, op. cit., pg. 294.

41. *Ibid.*, pg. 295.

42. *Ibid.*, pg. 294.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-295.

44. *Did Jesus Exist?*, op. cit., pp. 2, 4, 5.

45. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

46. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.

47. Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*. New York: Harper One, 2014, pg. 171.

48. Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001, pg. 89, s.v., "Historical Jesus, Search for the."

49. C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002, pg. 54, s.v., "historical Jesus."

50. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, op. cit., pg. 59, s.v., "historical Jesus," emphasis added.

51. *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 54.

52. *How Jesus Became God*, op. cit., pg. 1.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

54. *Ibid.*, pg. 174.

55. *Ibid.*, pg. 187.

56. All orthodox Christians believe Jesus was fully human as well as being fully God; why Ehrman belabors the fact of Jesus' humanity is unclear.

57. *How Jesus Became God*, op. cit., pp. 353-354.

58. *Did Jesus Exist?*, op. cit., pp. 90, 91.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-170.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-295.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336. Ehrman's "different Jesus" is very apparent on these two pages of this book.

62. *Ibid.*, pg. 336.

63. *How God Became Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 1. The "limbo" is a dance in which the participants bend over backwards to walk under a pole that is increasingly lowered.

64. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982, pp. 106-107, italic in original.

65. R.C. Sproul, *Who Is Jesus?* Sanford, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2015, pp. 2-3.

66. William Arndt, Robert G. Hoerber, and Walter R. Roehrs, *Bible Difficulties and Seeming Contradictions*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987, pg. 125.

67. *Can We Still Believe the Bible?*, op. cit., pp. 1-2, italic in original.

68. G. Richard Fisher, "But the Bible is Full of Contradictions! Pushing Through the Fog of Apparent Bible Discrepancies," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2004, pp. 1, 15-21; and "Interrupting Bart Ehrman: Responding to a Contemporary Apostle of Doubt," op. cit.

69. Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982. (An updated edition of this publication has been released as: *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.)

70. Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2008.

71. See further, John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988); J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions from Every Book of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1997); Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992); William Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955); and Ron Rhodes, *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).

72. Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels: New American Standard Version* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2012); and Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

73. *Can We Still Believe the Bible?*, op. cit. pg. 250, from note 16.

74. *Misquoting Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 13-14, italic in original. Elsewhere, Ehrman relates that he actually said this to a friend of his, Pastor Goranson, who had reminded him of the words of Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6); Ehrman countered with, "But what if Jesus never said that?" (*How Jesus Became God*, op. cit., pg. 87.)

being framed as a basic human right. Blatant transsexual and transvestite activities are now regarded as natural and normal. And if anyone dares express another opinion, even if expressed graciously and kindly, he is considered homophobic and risks serious ridicule as well as loss of job, position in society, family, and friends.

In a culture where tolerance is paramount and each has a right to his own opinions, irrespective of their veracity, dissenting views on homosexuality are seldom tolerated. People either toe the politically correct line or suffer the consequences. Moreover, being politically correct does not just mean recognizing homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. It requires that we all espouse and enthusiastically promote the entire homosexual agenda.

Political correctness has taken precedence over biblical correctness. Some who are prominent and respected within Christian circles are now responding to the demands of homosexual activists with answers that are more anecdotal than biblical. Megachurch pastor Bill Hybels told the members of his Willow Creek Community Church that there was probably “a childhood experience that you had that you didn’t handle well and you still regretted the rest of your life.”<sup>3</sup> It was just such an experience that apparently has shaped his theological disposition toward homosexuality. He told his congregation:

“I was in the fourth grade. After school one day I noticed some buddies of mine are surrounding a kid in my class — our class — who some people, rumor had it, fourth grade now, they said that he was effeminate. I think they used — pardon — but I think they used the word ‘queer’ in that day. I didn’t fully understand what that meant. He was a polite kid, smart kid. He was not quite as macho as some of the rest of the guys. And some of my buddies start pushing this kid, and then they start beating him

with their fists. Now he’s down on the ground, they’re punching him in the face, and this kid is really taking a horrendous beating. And I didn’t stop it. And I have lived with that my whole life. I knew when I watched what was going on to that kid. I was like, that kid’s just a little different. He’s not bad. He didn’t antagonize anybody. He was different in a way that made other people uncomfortable with themselves. And so they just beat the daylight out of him. ... That was a defining moment in my life.”<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, Pope Francis has called for an apology to gay persons who have been “offended” and “that Christians and the Roman Catholic Church should seek forgiveness from homosexuals for the way they had treated them.”<sup>5</sup>

Christians who anchor themselves in a belief that the Scriptures are their final authority are in a most difficult place. If we live in obedience to written revelation, we cannot accept homosexual behavior as anything less than immorality. Yet, if we speak against the homosexual lifestyle, we are accused of hatred, judgmentalism, and homophobia. Add to this the fact that most Christians have never seriously examined the biblical teachings on homosexuality and that issues are now arising that have rarely been seriously debated throughout Church history, then we can readily see why the faithful children of God are being squeezed. They find themselves between the immovable Word of God and its clear teachings on all forms of immorality, including homosexuality, and the changing Western culture, which now sees homosexuality as perfectly acceptable and normal, as it does most other forms of immorality. Christians are quickly becoming marginalized as ill-tempered, mean-spirited bigots who want to inflict pain on innocent people who just happen to be different from them in their sexual orientations and values.

#### A LITTLE HISTORY

There has never been a time in history in which homosexuality has

been seen as an “orientation” or when homosexual marriage was considered acceptable and normal. The homosexual community has attempted to revise history (with much success) and make traditionalists appear to be the ones out of step with the past and “on the wrong side of history.” But even a brief glance into human history reveals that the homosexual movement of today is simply out of stride with how homosexuality has been viewed as far back as it can be traced. To be sure, homosexual attraction and behavior has existed throughout antiquity, but not in the forms we are seeing today.

Glenn Stanton, who is on staff with *Focus on the Family* and conducts lectures and debates on gender and sexuality, surveys some of the secular experts on the history of sexuality. These experts, who do not represent Christianity, are united in their view that the homosexual activity which is common today is much different from anything we have seen in the past. Quoting one scholar of Greco-Roman sexual behavior he writes:

“In the ancient world, sanctionable homosexual acts were usually based on inequity: you are not supposed to desire somebody of the same age and status category as yourself. Therefore, young men and slaves are fair game, particularly your own slaves, who are your passive human property.”<sup>6</sup>

Stanton also writes that one historian, Michael Foucault, “explains” in his three-volume set entitled *History of Sexuality* that “‘homosexuality’ as a physiological or psychological category was not even present in the minds or language of the ancient or even pre-modern worlds. It was not how one was but an action, something one did.”<sup>7</sup> Adding to that, Stanton points out that yet another scholar claims, “‘homosexuality’ as a category for understanding or identifying oneself is just about a century old.”<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that homosexual behavior was uncommon in the past. Some have “claimed that both

Socrates and Plato were homosexuals, along with fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors.<sup>9</sup> But on a wide scale level, it was not understood as it is today. Later when homosexuality as an identity was first recognized, it was considered a disorder that needed treatment by the psychological community.<sup>10</sup> It was not until the 1960s that the word “gay” was used to describe homosexuals. The word was developed in an attempt to describe something that had never been seen before in history and was explained as “a very spirited and energetic social/political movement of identity based on same-sex sexual relations and identity.”<sup>11</sup>

Today the homosexual community demands respect and full acceptance. The homosexual evolution to date has moved from:

- An act
- To a thing in itself, classified as a disorder to be healed of
- To an orientation and thus, a political movement
- To an identity, and thus, a right.<sup>12</sup>

Add to all of this the fact that until very recently the universal Church, taking its marching orders from Scripture, has recognized homosexual activity as sinful. Few, if any, in times past tried to use the Bible to support homosexuality. Nor did anyone try to explain away or revise the biblical texts that condemned it; that is until homosexual leaders put on the pressure. It becomes clear, purely from a secular and ecclesiastical historical basis, that the homosexual agenda of modern times is out of step with history. The accusation that traditionalists are on the wrong side of history is clearly not true. Whether homosexuality is right or wrong is another issue (and one we will presently address), but as far as history is concerned, we have never seen anything quite like this before now.

## DEFINING TERMS

Before we look at the biblical data, it would be good to define the many terms that have developed and been popularized in recent years. These can be confusing, and even those within

the culture stumble over many of them, so it is good to get a handle on the terminology. Most are familiar with the recurrent terms specific to the LGBT (standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered) community. But to that list should be added other initials such as Q-I-A-A-P. What does all of this mean? Glenn Stanton, in his book *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor*, provides a good understanding of nearly all the above initials and what they mean.<sup>13</sup> Here is a summary of his definitions:

**L** — Lesbian: women who are sexually attracted to other women.

**G** — Gay: men who are sexually attracted to other men, although the term can be used more broadly to denote same-sex attraction in general.

**B** — Bisexual: someone who is attracted sexually to both male and female.

**T** — Transgendered: a person born physically as a man or woman but who sees himself/herself as the opposite sex, and may have begun the process of transitioning to the gender he/she feels he/she is inside by surgical and pharmaceutical methods. Bruce Jenner recently gave massive publicity to transgenders.

**Q** — Queer: identifies one as challenging the moral value and hierarchy of most sexual expressions and identities, but it is not a precise term and can mean different things to different people, even in the LGBT community.

**I** — Intersexed: a term used for those born with ambiguous genital or chromosomal issues, also called hermaphrodites.

**A** — Asexuals: those who have no sexual attraction at all.

**A** — Ally: typically denotes a heterosexual who is on board with the LGBT agenda, but not necessarily homosexual themselves.

**P** — While not on Stanton’s list, this last item could be added. It stands for “pansexual” and contemporary singer Miley Cyrus recently put this term on the map by claiming, “I am literally open to every single thing that is consenting and doesn’t involve an

animal and everyone is of age. Everything that’s legal, I’m down with.”<sup>14</sup>

Understanding the meaning of these initials will help us going forward in dealing with the current culture. The remainder of this article will refer to the homosexual community as LGBT, as it is presently the popular handle for those promoting a non-heterosexual lifestyle in its numerous forms.

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

We need to turn now from the rapidly changing values concerning sexuality, as is exhibited in our culture, to the never-changing teachings of Scripture. As Christians, we recognize the absolute authority of the Bible, God’s revealed Word, and humbly submit to whatever it proclaims, whether it is popular or not, or as Paul says, “in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2).

In this regard, it is worth noting that while the Bible says relatively little on homosexuality, what it does say has always been understood, until very recently, even by unbelievers, as a condemnation of the evil nature of the act. And while relatively little is said about homosexuality as such (a fact that the pro-LGBT contingency highlights), a great deal is said about the sinfulness of immorality, of which homosexuality is included.

There are seven strategic biblical passages that deal directly with homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> They are: Genesis 19:1-11; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; and Jude 7.

Those who defend homosexual activity call these “clobber verses,” implying that conservative Christians use them as heartless clubs to beat down those with opposing views. But attempting to attack one’s opponent in a debate by belittling them and/or their motives is hardly a valid argument. We must engage with what Scripture actually has to say on the subject, not resort to name-calling and defensiveness.

Unfortunately, there is obviously not enough space available in an article of this nature to deal with each of these comprehensively. However, it

is necessary to at least point out the key components of these verses.<sup>16</sup>

**Genesis 1:27 and 2:20-25** — These passages are not included in the seven biblical texts which discuss homosexuality, but they lay the foundation for gender roles and marriage. When the Lord created a helper for Adam (man) he created a human being much like Adam, made in the image of God (1:27). Yet Eve (woman) was unlike Adam in other ways. Adam recognized immediately that the Lord had given him a woman to be “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). And from that point on, it was determined that men will leave their parents and be joined to a wife (a woman) and they would become one flesh (2:24).

The helper God sovereignly chose to be suitable throughout life for Adam specifically, and men in general, would be a female. Nothing in Scripture amends, adjusts, or fine-tunes this arrangement. Genders are recognized as equal but having different roles. Marriage is biblically defined as a joining of a man and woman in a one-flesh relationship. This has been the undisputed view of the people of God since the beginning of time and accepted almost universally throughout all societies, although not always without some corruption of the design (e.g., polygamy).

**Genesis 19:1-11** — The first encounter with homosexual behavior in the Bible is found in the infamous story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin for which the cities were destroyed was that of immorality and wide-spread homosexuality that cumulated in an attempted homosexual gang rape of Lot’s visitors (who we know from the sacred text were angels, but which the inhabitants thought were mortal men). Some LGBT revisionists claim the real sin at Sodom was radical inhospitality<sup>17</sup> and it had nothing to do with homosexuality.

While it must be admitted that the key scene in the story is an ugly picture of attempted gang rape, it must also be recalled that the angels were sent to Sodom and Gomorrah, prior to this encounter, because of the

inhabitants’ deep moral corruption. Jude 7 makes it clear that the primary evidence of their depravity was homosexual in nature. The attempted rape scene simply reveals the depths to which they had fallen.

**Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** — The first verse reads, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination,” and the second states, “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.” These verses are clear in their denunciation of homosexual activity. But those who desire to dilute their importance point out that these were prohibitions under the Mosaic code which no longer apply to the Church age. After all, under the Law the Jews were not to eat catfish or have sexual relationships during the wife’s menstrual period (Leviticus 11:9-12; 18:19). Yet these types of laws are no longer binding on Christians, so why would we say that laws pertaining to homosexual activity are binding today?

Clearly it should be noted that while the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law are no longer incumbent upon believers, the moral code is. As Kevin DeYoung notes:

“Jesus referred to Leviticus 19:18 (‘Love your neighbor as yourself’) more than any other verse in the Old Testament, and the New Testament refers to it ten times.”<sup>18</sup>

So the moral teachings found in Leviticus cannot simply be dismissed as inapplicable today. In particular, the teachings of the New Testament are identical to those of the Old Testament when it comes to other moral, sexual issues. Both denounce all forms of immorality as sin. Homosexual behavior would not be exempt from these denunciations. It should also be noted that the condemnation of LGBT activity in Leviticus is found in the context of one of the reasons the Canaanites were morally defiled (Leviticus 18:19-25).

**Romans 1:24-32** — The context of this text is that of the wrath of God

being presently poured out on those who have suppressed God’s truth and chosen to live in unrighteous defiance of the Lord (1:18-23). Because of this rebellion the Lord gives the rebels over to the very sinful passions that they so desire with the result they are further dishonored and degraded (1:24-26). One of the specific degrading passions identified is homosexuality:

“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (vv. 26-27, NASB).

Paul’s discourse seems clear enough; so how does the revisionist get around these verses? According to Stanton they do so by saying that the passage is teaching that when those who are by nature homosexual commit heterosexual acts, or those who are heterosexual commit homosexual acts, they are acting against their nature, and that is wrong. We should all behave sexually in accordance with our nature.<sup>19</sup>

This is clearly stretching the meaning of the text to the point of absurdity. Until the rise of the modern LGBT agenda no one would have considered such an interpretation. On the one hand, in antiquity few even considered someone being of homosexual orientation. They may have committed homosexual acts, but they were not by nature homosexuals. That is not how people thought until the 20th century. On the other hand, the consistent teaching throughout Church history is that homosexuality is a perversion of God’s gift of sex. Apologist James White and Pastor Jeffrey Niell state:

“Some believe, along with John Chrysostom, one of the leading commentators of the early Christian church, that the penalty re-

ferred to in this passage is the sexual perversion itself. It becomes a cycle, the sin degrading the sinner who is trapped by his or her own lusts."<sup>20</sup>

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11** — Paul is writing in this section to the Christians at Corinth warning them that those whose lives are characterized by certain sins will not inherit the kingdom of God. In that list are homosexuals. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates the Greek words *oute malakoi oute arsenokoitai* as “nor effeminate, nor homosexuals.” The English Standard Version (ESV) captures the clear meaning by translating the text, “men who practice homosexuality.”<sup>21</sup>

The idea then is that those who are living out a homosexual lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of God. Revisionists have claimed that the passage does not reference normal, loving, consensual homosexual acts, but perhaps prostitution or rape. Yet nothing in the context gives anyone the right to narrow the meaning of the words to such an interpretation.

**1 Timothy 1:9-10** — Paul is arguing that the Law was made for rebellious people. He then gives characteristics of the kinds of rebels he believes the Law addresses. In a list which includes murderers, kidnappers, liars, and those who kill their parents is also found immoral men and homosexuals. Clearly, Scripture categorizes LGBT behavior as a defiance of God and His moral law.

**Jude 7** — Jude claims that the men at Sodom and Gomorrah “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire” (ESV). The revisionists say the unnatural desire is a reference to trying to have relationships with angels, but there is no indication that these men had any idea that the angels were anything but mortal visitors to the home of Lot. The gross immorality evident in these wicked cities was that of homosexual activity.

The teaching found in Scripture, and understood as such throughout all of history, is that homosexuality is a serious perversion of a marvelous gift from God. It is a sin of immorality

and is condemned consistently throughout the Word of God. The only hope of those trying to square LGBT philosophy with Scripture is to revise the traditional meaning of these seven specific texts and numerous general prohibitions against immorality, interpreting them in ways that they have never been understood by anyone in the past.

At other times, the above-cited Scriptures along with other passages which address sins of immorality are simply avoided and substituted with “proof texts” that are not suited to the point. It conforms to the adage, “You can torture a text and make it say anything.” Bill Hybels presents a graphic illustration of this practice:

“One of my favorite passages [is] in the book of Acts ... The Apostle Peter, he gets that vision of the blanket that comes down and goes and visits Cornelius’ house. Cornelius is a Gentile and he invites him in. Peter can’t go into the home of the Gentile, he can’t preach to Gentiles. He knows the rules. And yet in that moment the Holy Spirit says, ‘I want you to go.’ So he crosses that threshold into Cornelius’ house and he preaches the Gospel, and Cornelius, and like the whole household gets saved. So Peter afterwards is reflecting, and it’s almost — if you read the text in Acts 10 — like he has this eureka moment and he goes, ‘Oh my gosh, guess what I just realized, there is no partiality with God.’ It blows his mind. And I hope you do understand, there is no partiality with God. [Applause from congregation] ... So I dream of the day when — when our church has a heart filled with no partiality, just open embrace.”<sup>22</sup>

Hybels’ use of Acts 10 for inclusion of homosexuals — which speaks to the Jews’ aversion toward Gentiles (and God including them in His plan of salvation) with what Hybels sees as the Church’s aversion toward homosexuals — is a wretched interpretation and shows how far one must go to foster the LGBT philosophy. There is

nothing inherently wrong or sinful with being a Gentile. Hybels is in serious error when he compares one’s non-Jewishness (or nationality) to homosexuality. It is a desperate attempt to change the meaning of God’s revelation to fit the mood of the moment. Only because many Christians today have not been serious students of the Bible could such a frantic effort be even moderately successful within the Church.

## MODERN ISSUES

Fans of the original Star Trek television series will recognize one of the opening lines to each show as Captain Kirk said that he and the crew of the Starship Enterprise wanted “to boldly go where no man has gone before.” You don’t have to be a “Trekkie” to recognize that when it comes to the 21st century and the LGBT agenda, we have gone where no one has gone before. We have entered new territories. Questions, discussions, accusations, and the like have emerged that have never appeared in the past. In the remainder of this article, some of these issues will be addressed.

## IS LGBT ATTRACTION SIMILAR TO RACIAL DIFFERENCES?

One accusation often used to stop criticism of the LGBT agenda is that those who are opposed to homosexuality are reacting just as racists do. If we find someone unacceptable because of their ethnicity and we treat them as inferior, we are committing the sins of racism and partiality (cf. James 2:1-7, which actually deals with mistreatment of the poor). Does it then follow that if we are not in agreement with LGBT and accepting of their behavior, we are committing the same sins? Not at all. LGBT behavior is a moral issue, not a racial difference. As Christians, we are called to love all people including LGBTs, but that does not mean we are required to agree with their sinful lifestyles and philosophies.

## ARE PEOPLE BORN HOMOSEXUAL?

A lot of heat has been generated over this question. Part of the

argument is that if the Lord has created people who are biologically LGBT then how can they be held accountable for LGBT behavior? Bill Hybels maintains that men and women don't "choose" to be gay, they "discover" it. He expounds on this view, saying:

"And people are coming to Christ, men and women, and we're baptizing them. They're joining small groups, they're getting into Bible studies and they're growing. And then one by one, people would take me off to the side and they would say, 'Hey Bill, I love my new life in Christ, but there is something you need to know.' I'm like, 'Hey anything, you know.' 'I'm gay.' 'I'm like, wow.' Now, I've probably had, over the 40 years, 200 people from this church — many of you, right in this room — come out to me because I am your pastor. And those are precious moments. ... In almost every single situation when I ask the question, 'Did you choose to be gay?' In the 200 people or so that have come out to me, not a single person has ever said, 'Oh yeah, I flipped a coin, decided to be gay.' Never. They say, 'I discovered I was gay. I didn't choose it, I discovered I was.'"<sup>23</sup>

However, it must be noted that many argue that science at this point simply has not given any solid evidence that there is some genetic predisposition or dominant gene which causes one to be homosexual. They maintain that the cause of sexual orientation is not known at this time.<sup>24</sup> But it is also important to be aware that others contend that the scientific evidence disputes the claim of a genetic predisposition toward homosexuality. *My Genes Made Me Do It!: Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence*, written by brothers Neil and Briar Whitehead, is promoted as a "clear, comprehensive and accessible book [which] takes an objective and orthodox look at over 10,000 scientific papers and draws the only conclusion possible: any biological contribution to homosexuality is weak and indi-

rect."<sup>25</sup> The book's product page on Amazon.com further states:

"While the West has generally capitulated to the idea that homosexuality is innate and unchangeable, the scientific facts are now indisputable — homosexuality is not biologically hard-wired in any way. In fact half the homosexual population moves towards heterosexuality in the natural course of life — it's just that very few people ever hear about it."<sup>26</sup>

The authors themselves explain:

"So much of what people in the West believe about homosexuality now, is not the truth. The blind are leading the blind. It suits some people to believe what they do, but many others genuinely don't know what to believe and would welcome the truth if they only knew where to find it. Here is a very basic piece of truth. There is nothing fixed or final about the homosexual orientation and its natural expression — homosexual behaviour. No politician, church leader or member, judge, teacher or counsellor, or homosexual person, or friend or family of a homosexual person, needs to feel forced into a position on homosexuality based on the apparent immutability of the homosexual orientation. Homosexuality is not in-born, not genetically dictated. Nor for that matter is heterosexuality or any other human behaviour. In fact our genes do not make us do anything. Whether it's homosexuality, a foul temper, bed-wetting or addiction to chocolate, our genes have very little to do with it."<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, there are many complicated factors that might be at the root of LGBT orientation; at this point it is probably more honest to admit that the jury is out and may never come in.<sup>28</sup> But, whatever the cause, "these factors do not remove culpability from the equation. We are all products of nature and nurture. We all struggle with desires that should

not be fulfilled and with longings for things illicit."<sup>29</sup>

The biological argument could be used by mass-murderers, pedophiliacs, chronic liars, and virtually everyone to justify their sins. We are all born with a corrupt nature which desires to fulfill sinful passions. Homosexuality is merely one of those for some people, whatever the root cause. As with other sinful behavior, one must repent and deal with it through the power of the Holy Spirit and according to biblical principles.

### SHOULD LGBTs BE INVOLVED IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?

The local church today has to face issues such as whether LGBTs should be allowed to attend the church. Anyone who desires to attend a service where the Word is ministered, and who will do so without causing disruption or attempting to indoctrinate others with their views, should be welcomed. Most churches of any size have a number of unbelievers who attend, and some do so regularly. By definition they are in bondage to sin, yet if they are willing to come under the hearing of the Word, why would we not welcome them? The same is true of LGBT folks.

However, there are limits. Attendance does not equate to or allow for active ministry. And unbelievers should clearly not be allowed participation in the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Yet what about involvement in ministry, especially if they are making claim to being a Christian? Here again the short answer is *no*.

Be that as it may, Hybels does not agree and maintains that his Willow Creek flock should find "a way that we can hold on to a biblical position of the traditional view of marriage and be respectful and inclusive to people in the LGBT community who are trying to live for God, trying to love God, and trying to at least be part of a church that won't toss them."<sup>30</sup>

He tells of one adolescent who "became a Christian in our junior

high ministry and then he came out and discovered that he was gay."<sup>31</sup> This young man, along with Hybels, organized *The Saturday Night Gang*, a hand-selected group of homosexuals which Hybels defines as "kind of like a small group, like a discipleship group."<sup>32</sup> Hybels then describes the group's vocations:

"We don't just talk about gay issues; we talk about how to follow Christ better. We talk about how to pray better. And we talk about how to use our spiritual gifts in these kinds of things."<sup>33</sup>

Hybels says that at one recent meeting, "Fourteen gay brothers and sisters and me on our knees and we prayed that someday we could help our church understand that there must be a way to hold to the tenets of Scripture and lovingly embrace people who are trying to navigate their very complicated life under the loving rule of God. ... I would like to think that there is a way that we can be loving and respectful to the LGBT community while staying anchored with our traditional biblical view. There must be a way. [Resounding applause from congregation.]"<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Hybels tells his flock that the members of this group "are as filled with the Holy Spirit as I am. They have a level of love for our church even though our church has the traditional standard. They still love our church and want to help move it forward in whatever way that they can."<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Hybels is not alone in his inclusive stance and his call for tolerance. Glenn Stanton also believes LGBTs belong in the local church and should be allowed to minister but in non-teaching, non-leadership roles. Still other high-profile megachurch pastors like Andy Stanley can be added to the list. Yet despite this inclusive polity accepted and promoted by so many, this is problematic on a number of levels.

First, we have to decide what a church is. If it is the body of Christ composed of believers only, as Scripture teaches, then unbelievers can

play no ministerial role. Each member of the church body is to minister and edify the other members through their spiritual gifts received from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 4:10). An unbeliever cannot edify the body because they lack the Holy Spirit and are not a member of Christ's body.

Additionally, if active LGBTs in the church claim to be Christians, how can their unrepentant lifestyle be ignored? What are we to do with scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 5 which does not allow open immorality to be practiced among those in the local church who claim to be believers? And what about church discipline which Stanton does not mention? Stanton, and others, stumble badly in this area. Unsaved LGBTs who cause no disturbances should be welcomed to attend our churches to hear the Gospel and the truth of Scripture, just like any sinner. But those claiming to be Christians yet living in immoral situations (gay or straight) must be confronted and ultimately removed if they refuse to repent, and not invited to serve in behind-the-scenes ministries.

Biblically speaking, apart from repentance and restoration, there is no way in which a local church may allow into fellowship and service those who are living a lifestyle which is in opposition to the most basic of Scripture's moral requirements. To allow such to minister in the church without confrontation is also to do them a great disservice. We are in essence deceiving them into thinking that all is well with them and the Lord and the Lord's Church.

### IS HOMOSEXUAL ATTRACTION SIN?

This is not an easy question. If a person has what appears to be same-sex orientation, through whatever cause, and their "natural" desire is now for people of their own gender, is that sin? Most of us would agree that we cannot always control our natural bent toward something. The vast majority of people have sexual attraction toward those of the opposite sex. This attraction is normal and good in its place. However, hetero-

sexual lust for a woman who is not one's wife is definitely sinful.

A natural attraction for the opposite sex can quickly move into sinful desire, which is wrong and condemned by God. The same is true with those who might have a LGBT orientation. They may be naturally attracted to those of their own sex, due to either nature or nurture or both, but when lustful thoughts are entertained, sin has been committed within the heart of the individual. Heath Lambert, the Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), agrees:

"I feel attractions every day that I should not feel. But I don't think there is any hope, or joy, or victory for either one of us [speaking in the context of a Christian man dealing with same-sex attraction] in minimizing the sinful distortions of our hearts."<sup>36</sup>

### THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

As the LGBT agenda has gained traction in America, and specifically after the Supreme Court legalized homosexual marriage, the evangelical Church has been scrambling for a response. Unfortunately, there is not a united front representing the Church. For example, within many major, relatively conservative denominations and organizations, there have sprung up movements actively lobbying for acceptance of LGBTs and homosexual behavior including same-sex marriage and even ordination of homosexuals.<sup>37</sup> Others have been more ambiguous.

Atlanta megachurch pastor Andy Stanley, for example, preached a message in 2012 at his North Point Community Church that seemed to embrace homosexuals in a committed same-sex relationship or marriage. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, quickly addressed what he described as Stanley's "shot now reverberating around the evangelical world" in an opinion article published by *The Christian Post*:

"He [Stanley] told of a couple with a young daughter who di-

forced when the wife discovered that the husband was in a sexual relationship with another man. The woman then insisted that her former husband and his gay partner move to another congregation. They did move, but to another North Point location, where they volunteered together as part of a 'host team.' The woman later told Andy Stanley that her former husband and his partner were now involved as volunteers in the other congregational location. The story took a strange turn when Stanley then explained that he had learned that the former husband's gay partner was still married. Stanley then explained that the partner was actually committing adultery, and that the adultery was incompatible with his service on a host team. Stanley told the two men that they could not serve on the host team so long as the one man was still married. He later told of the former wife's decision not to live in bitterness, and of her initiative to bring the whole new family structure to a Christmas service. This included the woman, her daughter, her former husband, his gay partner, and his daughter. Stanley celebrated this new 'modern family' as an expression of forgiveness. He concluded by telling of Christ's death for sinners and told the congregation that Jesus does not condemn them, even if they cannot or do not leave their life of sin."<sup>38</sup>

Many have challenged Stanley to clarify his position but to date he has not done so, leaving concerned church leaders to interpret exactly what he is saying. The closest he has come to an explanation seems to be from comments he made during Catalyst West, an event series for pastors under 40, which he helped to formulate. A pro-homosexual news and entertainment website cited Stanley's remarks at the conference:

"We just need to decide from now on in our churches when a Middle School kid comes out to

his small group leader or a high school young lady comes out to her parents,' said Stanley. 'We just need to decide, regardless of what you think about this topic — no more students are going to feel like they have to leave the local church because they're same-sex attracted or because they're gay. That ends with us.' Stanley acknowledged that there was a diversity of views on homosexuality and gay marriage among his audience, but felt that regardless of these differences churches, as a collective, can create safe space for gay youth. 'There is not consensus in this room when it comes to same-sex attraction. There is not consensus in this room when it comes to gay marriage,' said Stanley. 'We just can't continue to look into the filter of our politics at our spirituality. It's got to be the other way around ... and specifically when it comes to this issue.'"<sup>39</sup>

In line with Stanley's apparent unwillingness to stake out a clear position on homosexuality comes a recent *Time* magazine article entitled "How Evangelicals Are Changing Their Minds on Gay Marriage." The author, Elizabeth Dias, states:

"Every day, evangelical communities across the country are arriving at new crossroads over marriage. My magazine story for *TIME* this week, 'A Change of Heart,' is a deep dive into the changing allegiances and divides in evangelical churches and communities over homosexuality. In public, so many churches and pastors are afraid to talk about the generational and societal shifts happening. But behind the scenes, it's a whole different game. Support for gay marriage across all age groups of white evangelicals has increased by double digits over the past decade, according to the Public Religion Research Institute, and the fastest change can be found among younger evangelicals — their support for gay marriage

jumped from 20% in 2003 to 42% in 2014."<sup>40</sup>

By way of confirmation of these statistics is a statement in a recent essay found in *Christianity Today*. The authors state:

"A Christian pro-family agenda that makes its central mission the reversal of gay marriage will be spectacularly unsuccessful. ... 70 percent of millennials (and more than 40 percent of evangelical millennials) support gay marriage."<sup>41</sup>

While the reversal of gay marriage must not be the central mission of the Church — the proclamation of Jesus Christ and His Gospel have that honor — this does not minimize the importance of the issue. Nor do we frame our mission on the basis of the latest surveys and opinions of the majority. And as a side-note, has not the definition of "Evangelical" been stretched to the breaking point when individuals can defy the clear teaching of the Scriptures on such an important topic and still be identified as Evangelicals?

Yet, without question, those claiming to be Evangelicals have certainly muddied the waters. Take an article found in the July/August 2015, edition of *Christianity Today* written by Margaret Philbrick telling the story of her brother who "announced he was becoming a woman." The article draws to a close with a disturbing statement and an equally disturbing event. The statement is: "We hurt the LGBT community by ostracizing them from our churches. Let's bless them with our listening ears, willingness to be uncomfortable, and hunger to seek the heart of Jesus in every conversation."<sup>42</sup>

This was preceded by an account in which Philbrick, her brother Charlie (who had the "sex reassignment surgery" and was now living as a woman with the name Carly), and her brother's lesbian girlfriend, Cera, attended together a Maundy Thursday church service in which foot washing was a part. As Philbrick poured water on the feet of Cera and Cera did the same to Philbrick, we are told:

“The Lord met us in a white plastic tub of tepid water. In that moment I knew I loved her. I admired her courage going forward and embracing the unfamiliar. She hardly knew me, yet she came to my Anglican, evangelical, charismatic church and let me wash her feet. How like the Lord to transform our uncomfortable, twisted hearts and minds with his presence and love.”<sup>43</sup>

If these types of ideas are reflective of the current confusing and fuzzy thinking within Christianity, we are in need of careful, biblical meditation on everything touching LGBT issues. Briefly, in light of these troubling trends within the Church, how should the Church respond? Here are the main headings in an article written by Alex Montoya and along with a few comments.<sup>44</sup>

First, the Church must expose homosexuality as sin against God. It is an offense against the Lord, a detriment to the Church, and a disservice to those involved in an LGBT lifestyle to minimize the clear teaching of Scripture that homosexual behavior, in whatever form, is sin.

Secondly, we must be careful to extend grace and compassion to homosexuals. Without question homosexuality is a sin, but it is one of many sins from which Christ died to set us free. Homosexuals are sinners, as are we all, and Christ died to save sinners. Because of the enslaving nature of sexual sins, careful and devoted discipleship will be necessary for any LGBT person who comes to Christ.

Thirdly, a church must remove practicing homosexuals who claim to be believers from their fellowship (1 Corinthians 5). Making them comfortable and providing them a safe environment within the church, as some are advocating, is to minimize the gravity of their sin and falsely assure them that all is well with them and the Lord. In addition, there is the danger of their attitude toward homosexuality infiltrating the thinking of other believers.

Finally, the Church must resist the homosexual community’s assault on society. Given the political and moral mindset of our culture at this time, standing against the LGBT agenda will be difficult and costly. But the Church of Christ must make its voice heard, declaring with biblical authority that homosexuality is a sin and a powerful influence toward further moral corruption in our culture.

## CONCLUSION

The LGBT agenda has made rapid progress in Western civilization in the last few decades. In just a few short years, homosexuality has gone from a disgraceful, sinful lifestyle which most made every effort to hide, to a psychological disorder that needed to be cured, to a normal alternative lifestyle, flaunted in public and defiantly daring any to oppose it. When Bruce Jenner became Caitlyn Jenner and shortly thereafter won the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network’s (ESPN) Arthur Ashe Courage Award, it was noted by some that very little courage was needed at all.

Seemingly, the majority within the sports world and the American public in general, rallied in support around Jenner.<sup>45</sup> Those needing courage are the ones who, even in the most gracious of ways, oppose the LGBT lifestyle and/or disagree with same-sex marriage. The world has changed so rapidly that many of us are getting whiplash.

The Church has been put in a unique and difficult position by standing for the truth which has been thoroughly rejected by the majority. But in darkness light shines best. May the Church not cave to the demands of the many, but honor the Lord who has set them free from the bondage of darkness.

## Endnotes:

1. “Whatever Happened to the Human Race?” in Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer, A Christian Worldview*. Westchester, Ill: Crossway Books, 1982, Vol. 5, pg. 283.
2. See further, “Homosexuality and psychology” on Wikipedia. Document accessed at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

**Homosexuality\_and\_psychology.** This article states, “In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder. The American Psychological Association Council of Representatives followed in 1975. Thereafter other major mental health organizations followed, including the World Health Organization in 1990.”

3. Bill Hybels, “Ask Bill” (Question and Answer Sermon), Willow Creek Community Church (central campus, South Barrington, Ill.), May 1, 2016.

4. Ibid.

5. Philip Pulella, “Pope says Church should ask forgiveness from gays for past treatment,” Reuters News Service, June 26, 2016.

6. Dominic Montserrat cited in Glenn T. Stanton, *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor, Being Friends in Grace and Truth*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2014, pg. 42. (Stanton cites Montserrat’s *Sex and Society in Greco-Roman Egypt*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1996.)

7. Michael Foucault cited in *ibid.*, pg. 43. (Stanton cites Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.)

8. David Halperin cited in *ibid.* (Stanton cites Halperin’s *Before Sexuality: Construction of the Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.)

9. John MacArthur, “God’s Word on Homosexuality: The Truth About Sin and the Reality of Forgiveness,” *The Master’s Theology Journal*. Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master’s Seminary, Fall 2008, Vol. 19, #2, pg. 170.

10. *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor*, *op. cit.*, pg. 44.

11. *Ibid.*, pg. 28.

12. *Ibid.*, pg. 44.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

14. Will Kohler, “Miley Cyrus: I’m Pansexual! (God Love Her.)” Back2Stonewall website, June 10, 2015, quotation rendered in italics in original. Document accessed at: [www.back2stonewall.com/2015/06/miley-cyrus-pansexual-god-love-her.html](http://www.back2stonewall.com/2015/06/miley-cyrus-pansexual-god-love-her.html).

15. Richard Mayhue, *How to Interpret the Bible for Yourself*. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001, pg. 89.

16. In addition to several of the publications by Christian authors found in the endnotes of this article, other books and resources that will prove helpful for the reader include: Joe Dallas, *The Gay Gospel? How Pro-Gay Advocates Misread the Bible*, (Harvest House Publishers, 2007); John Stott, *Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*, (Revel, 1998); Ron Rhodes, “What You Need to Know About Homosexuality,” (Personal Freedom Outreach, 2010); and Mike Haley, *101 Frequently Asked Questions About Homosexuality*,

(Harvest House Publishers, 2004).

17. Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2015, pg. 34; *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor*, op. cit., pp. 60-61; and David M. Tyler, "Is Homosexuality a Biblical Option? Dispelling the Contextual Theology of the Gay Christian Movement," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2013, pg. 7.

18. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, op. cit., pg. 43.

19. *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor*, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

20. James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002, pg. 120.

21. See, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, op. cit., pp. 59-67 for further exposition.

22. "Ask Bill" (Question and Answer Sermon), op. cit.

23. Ibid.

24. See further, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, op. cit., pp. 110-112 and *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor*, op. cit., pp. 93-100.

25. Neil E. and Briar K. Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It!: Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence*, Amazon.com product page.

26. Ibid.

27. Neil E. and Briar K. Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It!: Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence*. New Zealand: Whitehead Associates, 2014, pg. 10.

28. For a further thorough study of the question, "Is there a gay gene?" see

Michael A. Grisanti, "Cultural and Medical Myths about Homosexuality," *The Master's Theology Journal*, op. cit., Fall 2008, pp. 175-202.

29. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, op. cit., pg. 111.

30. "Ask Bill" (Question and Answer Sermon), op. cit.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Heath Lambert, "What Do You See? Same-Sex Attraction and a Biblical Approach to Looking," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) website, Feb. 16, 2015. Document accessed at: <https://biblicalcounseling.com/2015/02/what-do-you-see-same-sex-attraction-and-a-biblical-approach-to-looking/>.

37. See further, Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006, pp. 238-249.

38. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Is the Megachurch the New Liberalism?," Christian Post website, May 1, 2012. Document accessed at: [www.christianpost.com/news/is-the-megachurch-the-new-liberalism-74152/](http://www.christianpost.com/news/is-the-megachurch-the-new-liberalism-74152/).

39. Matt Hennie, "Atlanta pastor rejects anti-gay rhetoric of his dad," Project Q (Atlanta) website, May 7, 2015, ellipsis in original. Document accessed at: [www.projectq.us/atlanta/atlanta\\_pastor\\_rejects\\_anti\\_gay\\_rhetoric\\_of\\_his\\_dad?gid=16821](http://www.projectq.us/atlanta/atlanta_pastor_rejects_anti_gay_rhetoric_of_his_dad?gid=16821).

40. Elizabeth Dias, "How Evangelicals Are Changing Their Minds on Gay Marriage," *Time* magazine website, Jan. 15, 2015. Document accessed at: <http://time.com/3669024/evangelicals-gay-marriage/>.

41. Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner, "The Power of Our Weakness," *Christianity Today*, November 2015, pg. 44.

42. Margaret Philbrick, "Loving My Sister-Brother," *Christianity Today*, July/August 2015, pg. 56.

43. Ibid., pg. 55.

44. Alex D. Montoya, "The Church's Response to Homosexuality," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, op. cit., Fall 2008, pp. 233-248.

45. Jenner's exposure is not limited to just supermarket tabloids and entertainment news broadcasts, but is advanced by much of the mainstream media no matter how bizarre or outlandish the report. Recently, AOL featured a story on its news feed which stated: "Caitlyn Jenner has opened up about how she still 'loves' her former self, as she graces the cover of the new *Sports Illustrated*. ... 'I loved Bruce,' she explained. 'I still love him today. I like what he did and the way he set an example for hard work and dedication. I'm proud of that part of my life. But this woman was living inside me, all my life, and it reached the point where I had to let her live and put Bruce inside. And I am happier, these last 12 months, than I've ever been in my life'" ("Caitlyn Jenner: 'I'll always be proud of Bruce,'" June 28, 2016).



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## EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

rebuked for such thoughts in verse 14, and then admonished to say, "if the Lord wills" in verse 15. All of our desires and plans must ultimately be prefaced by "if the Lord wills."

In all reality, is there a mind power that can be harnessed and manipulated to create better outcomes? Can our minds alone abolish disease, create wealth, and refashion reality? Since the days of Oral Roberts and other high profile "healers," people have been waiting in vain for the proof. The claims have been out there for more than a century, yet sin, sickness, and death seem to still prevail in our fallen world. Lower mortality rates and better longevity are beholden to medical science and that is why even proclaimed faith healers such as Benny Hinn use the best doctors and hospitals.

Horowitz points out that positive affirmations heaped on sufferers, especially the terminally ill, can be cruel and thoughtless. It amounts to blaming the sufferers for their

suffering. The simple and irrefutable fact is that physical suffering, pain, and the aging process cannot be merely wished away.

Positive-thinking concepts dominate religious broadcasting. Slogans such as "This is your day" and "You deserve a miracle" abound. Name it and claim it — sometimes called positive confession — makes God out to be a heavenly vending machine where if we put in the right coinage we can get the selection we want. It is a "divine lottery" where the patron continually buys a ticket by sending a "seed-faith" donation to his or her favorite Word-Faith teacher with the hope that one day all the numbers match and he or she becomes the big winner — a new car, a better job, the perfect mate, an unexpected inheritance.

There is a limit to what our thoughts and minds can do. Words can influence, but not determine. Horowitz seems to call for a balanced approach as he takes on the inconsistencies of the New Age and positive-thinking movements. His "outlook" is "that positive thinking is less than its most enthusiastic exponents believe — it is

not a psycho-spiritual magic wand or an all-encompassing, result-making law of life. But it is also a great deal more than what its critics see it is, namely, a fool-baiting philosophy of refrigerator magnets and page-a-day calendars” (pp. 10-11).

It is important to know, however, that Horowitz is dealing with this vast topic and not necessarily from a biblical perspective, but rather as a historian. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his overall approach and perspective, it cannot be discounted that there is great value in his research and writing, which provides a detailed history of the key figures in New Thought, New Age, positive thinking, and positive confession. He exposes many of the modern-day descendants and shows the philosophical and metaphysical linkage.

We know factually that in early America people focused on salvation in Christ, the Church, godly living, hard work, loving others, and service to one’s neighbors. The focus was vertical and then horizontal — love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 23:35-40).

Horowitz traces how all of that began to change and the focus in New Thought became the mind of man. It was an entirely horizontal focus. The mind was seen as the primary obsession. It is all too obvious that currently our society is man-centered and not God-centered. We have dumped theology (the study of and focus on God) and become obsessed with anthropology (the study of and focus on man). Romans 1 said this would take place and details exactly what happens to a culture that forgets God and suppresses truth. Each day our news headlines bear witness to what Paul wrote in Romans.

Horowitz concludes that the modern message of the so-called Prosperity Gospel is simply New Thought repackaged. The only difference is that modern New Thought has new technology and new venues, along with twisted and tormented out-of-context Scripture verses. Horowitz also presents a cutting-edge study called Neuroplasticity (pp. 259, 273-275). He explains that brain studies in this area of research have shown that ideas and strong thoughts persisted in long enough can actually change brain structure and reroute the brain’s wiring. From a Christian and biblical perspective, what is called positive thinking could be in fact unrealistic thinking. If unrealistic thinking could actually change the brains circuitry, it could set up strong delusions. That certainly is a frightening thought.

Generally speaking, there is no doubt that many could be happier if they had a biblical frame of mind and were more thankful for all of God’s good gifts in an attitude of contentment (Philippians 4:6-7, 11). In the end it is not positive thinking or positive affirmations that are needed by the believer, but rather realistic, God-centered, biblical thinking. Philippians 2:5 sums it up well: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

—GRF

On June 27, California State Judge Jane Johnson approved a settlement between Spark Networks and the plaintiffs. Under the agreement, the company agreed to pay both men \$9,000 each along with \$450,000 in attorneys’ fees to their lawyers. Also, as part of the settlement, Spark Networks admitted to no wrongdoing.

In addition to ChristianMingle.com, the company owns and operates several other website dating services, including LDSSingles.com, CatholicMingle.com, AdventistSinglesConnection.com, and BlackSingles.com.

—MKG

## POPE SAYS CHURCH SHOULD SEEK FORGIVENESS FROM GAYS

Nearly three years after making his controversial statement, “Who am I to judge?” regarding homosexuality, Pope Francis now says that Christians must “ask forgiveness to the gay person who is offended.” The pope’s latest remarks came on June 26, as he spoke to reporters aboard his flight back to Rome following a visit to Armenia.

The pontiff also echoed his earlier remark saying, “The problem is a person that has a condition, that has good will and who seeks God, who are we to judge?” Federico Lombardi, a spokesman for the Vatican, explained that in saying “has a condition,” the pope was not suggesting a medical condition, but rather was saying a person “in a situation.” In Italian the word “condition” is synonymous with “situation.”

Pope Francis’ comments came days after one of his top advisors also asserted “that the Catholic Church should publicly apologize to homosexuals for what he called its scandalous and terrible treatment of them,” according to the online news source *LifeSite*. The report also said that German Cardinal Reinhard Marx “suggested in the interview that the Church ought to look favorably on same-sex relationships, but would not go as far as calling those relationships ‘marriage.’” Marx is one of nine cardinals specifically chosen by Pope Francis in an advisory role.

The call to apologize to homosexuals is being met with public rebuke from those in the Catholic Church, and not just at the grassroots level. South African Cardinal Wilfrid Napier immediately took to social media tweeting, “God help us! Next we’ll have to apologise for teaching that adultery is a sin! Political Correctness (PC) is today’s major heresy!”

—MKG



# Books in Review

## CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE

Chris Sinkinson

IVP Books, 240 pages, \$15.99

It is important for those who seek a basic understanding of discernment issues and apologetics to frequently read one of the many books that emphasize the necessity of the subject and outline the methods for defending the faith. Chris Sinkinson's *Christian Confidence* is one of those volumes. There is a lot here between its covers. Readers are shown not only reasons for apologetics, but also its various forms, and a survey of some of the key objections raised against the Christian faith.

Some may view apologetics as superfluous, but Sinkinson cautions, "Apologetics is sometimes treated as a specialized discipline or subject. However, it is important to recognize how closely it is related to the other things Christians do. We can consider apologetics in relation to evangelism, theology and philosophy. Theology provides the subject matter for apologetics (what we believe). Philosophy provides guidelines for what is rational (why we believe). Evangelism is the purpose of apologetics (how to help others to believe)" (pg. 15). We are also told that "evangelism should always have apologetic content" and "Apologetics is persuasive evangelism that engages with the real issues of the day" (pg. 17).

In that "Apologists should be concerned with logic" (pg. 31), Sinkinson maps out, in the early portion of his book, several informal logical fallacies that are common. These include the invalid arguments using *ad hominem*, genetic and etymological fallacies, straw men, and begging the question. (That latter item is quite often misunderstood and misused. It does not mean to incite a question, but rather it refers to circular reasoning.)

The book surveys three main systems of apologetics. While some try to categorize apologetics under four or five headings, Sinkinson opts for three. Those systems are: fideism, evidentialism, and presuppositionalism. If all of this sounds too complicated, not to worry, Sinkinson makes it understandable. While taking a more eclectic position in regard to one method over another, he does warn that fideism — in an extreme form — allows one to "excuse themselves from having to take tricky questions seriously" and "sets young believers up

for failure when they encounter those awkward questions in later life" (pg. 49). Sinkinson is spot on when he writes, "The fact is that our presentation of the gospel will vary with the audience or friend we are addressing. ... We listen to identify the worldview or points of contact that we can use as starting points" (pg. 74).

The middle portion of the book is devoted to a survey of apologetics throughout the ages. For some readers this may be the slowest-reading section of the publication. But hang in there! It is a fascinating study of philosophy and why people think the way they do. Starting with the Greek philosophers before Christ (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), Sinkinson moves on to the early Church (Justin Martyr, Augustine), then to the Middle Ages (Thomas Aquinas) and the Reformation (Luther, Calvin), up to and through the Enlightenment (John Locke Descartes, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche). He shows us the good, the bad, and the ugly.

In the subsequent chapter, he shows the further reliability of Scripture through archaeology. Here he offers one of his finest observations, saying, "If we find the Bible reliable where it can be tested, then we have good reason to trust it in those places where it cannot be tested" (pg. 144). He presents numerous examples of archaeological discoveries that validate Scripture. Most readers will be crying, "More!" as the chapter ends. And "more" could have been given as his sampling is specifically Old Testament, passing over important New Testament discoveries such as the Pontius Pilate Stone and the tomb of the high priest (Joseph) Caiaphas. In this chapter, Sinkinson also discounts the junk archaeology of the late Ron Wyatt.

The final section of the book explores three of the "main lines of attack on Christianity." Here Sinkinson presents an apologetic for intelligent design, the exclusiveness of Christianity, and why God allows suffering and evil. His presentation and arguments are straight forward and persuasive. If there is any flaw in the book, however, it is in this section. He appears middle of the road when it comes to a creation model — old earth vs. young earth (pp. 149, 207). And he seems to suggest that there may be some "outside the reach of the gospel" who may come "to a saving knowledge of God" (pg. 200). Paul, in Romans 10:9-17, argues against that idea. Despite these weak spots, there is a tremendous amount of beneficial information and counsel that can be mined from *Christian Confidence*.

—MKG

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