

“What Does the Bible Say About Tattoos?”

I have a few family members who have recently gotten tattoos. I was wondering if there was any mention in the Bible about this being a good thing to do or a wrong thing to do? I thought that at one time I read something about it being wrong. And if it is wrong how can I address the issue in a decent way to people I love and care for who are not Christians?

Actually, yes the Bible does address the subject of tattoos. Lev. 19:28 says, “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.”

If your loved ones are not Christians, they may or may not care that God specifically addressed this issue in the Bible. If they do, knowing God said not to do it might be enough. If not, you might mention that there must be a good reason for God to forbid His people to permanently mark their bodies this way, and it turns out there are several.

1. To quote my brother-in-law, who became enamored of “body art” when he was younger and sports seven large tatoos on his body—which he now despises—“Permanent is a long, long time.” The majority of people who get tattoos regret it later.

2. Tattoos are exceedingly painful and expensive to have removed.

3. Some tattoo inks have metal in them, so if one’s health is threatened, an MRI can be complicated (and there can be some discomfort) by a tattoo.

4. On a more spiritual note, God may not want us to permanently mark our bodies because it is disrespectful to the body He fashioned and gave to us to steward. The fact that a

tattoo cannot be undone (completely) reflects the sad truth that some decisions are one-way and we box ourselves into a corner. Tattoos make a statement physically, but God intends that the purity and beauty of our LIVES make the statement, rather than "I was young (or drunk, or on drugs) and did this to myself." (Yes, I am biased, I will cheerfully admit. <grin>)

Now, the New Testament doesn't repeat this prohibition, and it's not a moral issue like sexual sin or lying or stealing which are still wrong and forever will be, so I don't think it's a sin anymore. Many people believe this is an area where we have Christian liberty, the freedom to do something that used to be prohibited.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries
August 2001

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Several e-mails arrived shortly after this article was posted, pointing out the fact that this prohibition against tattoos was part of the Levitical code, but Christians do not live under the Old Testament laws. Otherwise, we would be sinning to:

- Shave off beards and sideburns
- Wear crew cuts
- Wear linen/wool blends
- Not take a bath after intercourse
- Circumcise baby boys on any day other than the eighth
- Attend church sooner than 33 days after the birth of a baby

I appreciate being shown the need to explain the fuller picture.

The person who wrote merely asked if the Bible said anything about tattoos, and it does, and I pointed out some good reasons for that prohibition. However, it is also true that we do not live under Old Testament laws, and most of the Levitical prohibitions and requirements no longer apply because we live under a new covenant of grace. (I hasten to add here that the *moral* prohibitions, such as those against any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage, including homosexuality, are still firmly in place.)

Thus, while the Bible did prohibit tattoos in the Old Testament, it is not a sin to get one today. Dumb, maybe, but not sinful. <grin> (That's a joke. Please don't send me e-mails if you have one and like it. You have complete freedom in Christ to do anything He gives permission for you to do.)

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. . .And then this appeared in "Dear Abby," which I thought was well worth sharing:

Dear Abby: You have printed letters about tattoos, so I thought you might get a kick out of my experience. Two summers ago, my sister "Julie" confided that her daughter, "Whitney," had decided to get a tattoo before returning to college. Julie was upset about it, but could not change her daughter's mind because Whitney is on a full scholarship and didn't need anyone's approval. Julie asked if I could talk Whitney out of it, and I racked my brain trying to think of something to say that would sway her. A few weeks later, our families got together to celebrate Julie's 50th birthday. Whitney was there with her boyfriend. After we all had enjoyed ice cream and cake, I took Whitney and her boyfriend into the living room and popped in a videotape of a party my husband and I had thrown during the disco craze of the 70s. There we were in our leisure suits, gold chains, permed hair, platform shoes and having a great time.

Whitney and her boyfriend were rolling on the floor with laughter. They couldn't believe that "look" was actually the craze at the time. "Yes," I said, "that was the style. But as times changed, styles changed, and what was once 'in' was soon 'out.'"

At that moment, Julie and her husband walked into the living room dressed in retro clothes and wigs. They were followed by Grandma and Grandpa, who had applied fake tattoos to their arms and shoulders. Whitney was stunned to see her conservative grandparents so out of character.

It was then that we reminded Whitney we had been able to buy different clothes and change our hairstyles when the fad was over, but tattoos are forever.

Disco clothes and wigs: \$85

Fake tattoos: \$30

The look on Whitney's face: priceless!

(To date, no tattoos for Whitney.)

Signed,

Creative in Las Vegas

Dear Creative: Your letter: a gem. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. You made your point with an object lesson that was far more effective than any lecture would have been.

June 2003

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Addendum, September 2014

I'd like to add this YouTube video addressing the question of tattoos from my wise pastor, Todd Wagner of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas:

[See also "What About Body Piercing?"](#)

Boy Scouts: Let's Hear It For Masculinity

Ceremonies make me cry. Any ceremony, no matter how cheesy. But some ceremonies are deeply meaningful and important, which is how I about cried off all my makeup recently at a Boy Scout Court of Honor where the son of my Probe colleague Byron Barlowe received his Eagle Scout rank.

Understanding God's gift of gender is a big deal to me, and I viewed the ceremony through that grid. I saw the glory of healthy, godly masculinity on display, particularly the goodness of men teaching boys to be men.

I saw men serving others through leadership and modeling. The long-term commitment of many volunteer years in this particular troop showed that the leaders understood the value of faithfulness and persistence over time. Each Eagle Scout recipient was featured in a video that included remarks by the scout, each of his parents, and his troop mentor, and the many thank-yous to the men who gave of themselves as leaders pointed to their servant leadership.

Boys who had earned badges and who had advanced in rank were rewarded with a badge, affirmation and applause. (Which included the [left handshake](#), which I now know, thanks to Uncle Google, is a worldwide scouting thing.) Nobody gets badges and pins, much less the coveted Eagle scarf and pin, without working hard for them, a powerful antidote to the "everybody gets a trophy for showing up" mentality. It was a good reminder that true self-esteem and confidence don't come by speaking feel-good affirmations into a mirror; they are earned

the hard way by accepting a challenge and working through it to achieve a goal. But none of the boys who earned badges and rank advancement did it on their own. It took cooperation with and encouragement from others to achieve these things. The men were teaching boys that “no man is an island,” that God intends for men to do life in community, learning to ask for and accept help from others even as they offer help to others.

In the midst of all this male-glory, I loved that each boy advancing in rank was called forward with his mother, given a pin to place on a ribbon worn over her heart, and directed to give her a hug. When one of the scoutmasters was honored for achieving a leadership rank that he had worked on for many months, his wife was asked to come to the platform to assist with the ceremony, and he asked for the whole family to come up. All nine children. In this troop, boy scouts are not just about boys and men. Their connections and commitments to family are also valued, another glory of godly masculinity.

At one point, one of the scout leaders was at the microphone calling scouts and their mothers forward. His own son and his wife, carrying a toddler boy, stood on stage to receive their pin. As soon as the toddler saw his daddy, he started jumping excitedly and reaching for his father with uncontainable joy and delight in his daddy, who took him into his arms with a big smile. Later, I told this leader something I heard recently from an experienced therapist who wrote *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*: even with boys on the emotionally sensitive, artistic, creative end of [the gender spectrum](#), the ones more at risk for taking a gay identity when they get older, if a little boy lights up and runs to his father when he comes home (or, as in this case, when he sees him unexpectedly), that boy is in a good, secure place emotionally. A warm and positive connection with his father is the best foundation for emotionally and gender-secure boys.

And that is one of the benefits of Boy Scouts for any boy, especially the fatherless or the badly fathered. When a boy

receives attention, affirmation and affection ([the Three As](#)) from father-figures, he gets what he can only get from men, and which he needs to grow up to manhood. Even if a boy's dad is not around, those needs can be met by other men who can introduce him to the world of men in safe, healthy, godly ways. (And that is why the idea of gay scout leaders is scary: men who lack gender security cannot impart to boys what they don't own. They are still looking to get their own need for the Three As met, and that unmet need can so easily turn into predation. Even if they don't intend that initially.)

The final highlight of the evening was the scoutmaster's comments and charge to each of the two Eagle recipients. His grasp of the meaning and application of God's word, combined with his personal knowledge and understanding of each young man's character and story, was one of the most excellent manifestations of a pastor-teacher I've ever seen. The newly-minted Eagles were blessed by a man soaring in his position and responsibility as a spiritual leader as he pointed them, not to himself, but to Christ, and urged them to follow hard after Him. This is what godly leadership looks like.

I have long seen that women cannot imprint masculinity on a boy's heart; we can confirm it, we can affirm it, we can clap and cheer for it, but we cannot imprint it. We don't have what it takes, because God gives *men* that privilege.

And I am so, so glad He does.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/boy_scouts_lets_hear_it_for_masculinity on May 6, 2014.

“Help Me Change From Gay to Straight”

Hello Sue,

I am from Australia and I read your add about how you can help me to change from being gay to being straight.

Can you help me please?

I'm not sure what you meant about “reading my add” since I don't have any advertisements of any kind, but I have written about homosexuality on Probe.org and www.livehope.org. My understanding about how true and lasting change can occur in people is all about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who starts the process of setting things right when we put our trust and faith in Him and start the hard work of surrendering to Him. Daily. As a new way of life. Then change happens, all kind of change, because the fruit of the new life we receive from God is Christlikeness in us.

Some people who trust in Jesus discover that as they grow spiritually, receiving His great love and obeying the principles in His word the Bible, old wounds are healed, unmet needs are met through community with God's people, and they are led into new ways of seeing life, themselves, other people, and God Himself. They discover that they are changing, and they can finish growing up, which includes changing the way they think about people of the same sex and people of the opposite sex. They can develop attractions for the opposite sex. Or even just one person of the opposite sex.

There are no exercises for this kind of change. It is a result of a new orientation of submitting one's will to Jesus as boss (or Lord) of one's life, following Him and trusting in Him. The change that comes is the same as learning to move beyond self-centeredness to compassion and a desire to love and serve

others. Or learning to move beyond anger to forgiveness. Or learning to move beyond fear and anxiety to the peace of trusting that a loving God is in control. These changes are all reflections of emotional and spiritual maturity and God's work inside us to make us like His Son.

Some people who walk in intimacy with Jesus never develop attractions for the opposite sex. There are several reasons for this, but the important thing is that God's intention for our lives is far bigger and far more important than sexual attractions. Nonetheless, when God sets all things right, that includes rightly relating to both our own gender and the opposite sex—whether that process comes close to completion in this life or the next.

So, to answer your question, I would point you to Jesus. Not to religion—to Jesus Himself, which includes dynamic relationships with His people, those of us who truly know Him and are living in yieldedness and submission to Him. I would also invite you to investigate the free, confidential online support group for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality at Living Hope Ministries, www.livehope.org.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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Exodus is Shutting Down, But

Jesus Isn't

July 17, 2013

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them" dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted "gay to straight" change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but "flesh management," using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their "About Us" page:

*While we have never met anyone who “chose” to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.*

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God’s creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God’s standards, God’s intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one’s sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can’t stop being sinners and can’t stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, “I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader’s Conference except this past year, and have always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God’s truth, and encouraging people not so much to be “straight” but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: ‘Proclaim God’s Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.’ Nothing has changed for us.”

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.
- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to

take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt

When Ex-Gays Return to a Gay Identity

I recently received an envelope in the mail with no return address and no personal note, just copies of three articles about men who used to be part of Exodus International, who used to identify themselves as "ex-gay," and now repudiate

that part of their histories. It is consistent with emails and [blog comments](#) I have received pointing this out, and asking if that doesn't negate [my position that homosexuality is changeable](#).

No. The fact that some people, denouncing something they used to support, now represent themselves as proud gays and lesbians, doesn't change anything. Just as people who lived in sobriety from alcohol and drugs for years have been known to get sucked back into their addictions, it isn't surprising that some would get weary of the struggle against their temptations and stop fighting.

Some people gave up earlier than others, hoping and expecting that if they just kept living "the straight life," their feelings would catch up with their resolutions. They kept waiting for homosexual desires and temptations to disappear, and they didn't. So they decided that they were done with trying to pretend to be something they weren't. I'm good with not pretending; I'm a huge believer in [authenticity and transparency](#).

But if someone continues to experience same-sex attraction even if they don't act on it, does it mean they're gay, as the culture insists?

What the culture says—if you ever have same-sex feelings, it means you're gay—doesn't matter compared to what God says.

God calls us to make choices every day that contradict and violate our feelings and temptations, but which we choose because they are the right thing to do. From the basics of the Ten Commandments to the ultimate example of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, He calls us to choose obedience and behavior that honors Him and other people despite our feelings. What if we don't *feel* like telling the truth? Don't lie anyway. What if we don't *feel* like not killing the person who really ticks us off? Don't murder anyway. What if we don't

feel like remaining faithful to our spouse? Don't commit adultery anyway.

So what if someone doesn't *feel* like stewarding their sexuality in purity and self-control? Regardless of the nature of the temptation, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, God calls us to possess our own body in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4).

Sadly, some men who had come out of homosexuality have left their wives and children to return to living as gay men. This isn't really much different from men who leave their wives and children for another woman. Succumbing to temptation, regardless of who tempts us, is still sin. Heartbreaking, home-breaking sin.

We're hearing people saying, "I'm not ex-gay anymore because trying to be ex-gay doesn't work. 'Pray away the gay' (a rather offensive term used by scoffers) doesn't work. Trying hard to be straight doesn't work. 'Claiming my healing' doesn't work. I'm done."

And they're right.

What doesn't work:

Name-it-and-claim-it theology, the religious version of "wishing will make it so." Trying to speak reality into existence, as in "I am no longer gay because I'm a Christian," doesn't work because we don't create reality through our words. Only the Creator God can do that.

Casting out the demon of homosexuality. While there is always a demonic component to idolatry and unrepentant sin, homosexuality is not caused by a demon, any more than bigotry, selfishness or gossip are.

Trying harder, praying harder, reading the Bible, [begging God to make the gay feelings to go away](#). These human efforts are

the religious equivalent of mowing the grass to get rid of dandelions. (For a completely different approach—grace—check out [True-Faced](#).)

What does work:

Laying aside one's sexuality as the measure of identity. “Who I really am” according to our flesh is always going to be at odds with “who God says I am” according to His word. Seeking a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the spiritual disciplines moves us toward reframing our faulty identity, no matter who we are or what we struggle with. We need to choose to find our identity in what God says about us—most importantly, receiving and owning the truth that He says, “You are My beloved child in whom I am well pleased.”

Looking at the contributing factors that shaped the same-sex “hole” in one's heart (and the lies connected to them) to process them in light of God's love and sovereignty, and then forgive the people who inflicted the wounds.

Choosing to learn to live with a tension: our flesh wants things that are dishonoring to God, dysfunctional and dangerous, but God calls us to do the right thing anyway. Regardless of our desires and feelings. Right from the beginning, He told Cain, “[I]f you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it” (Gen 4:7). God didn't say to Cain, “I know, you're angry because I didn't accept your offering. That's who you are, an angry soul. Go and let your anger explode!” In the New Testament, we read, “The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need” (Eph. 4:28). God didn't say to the thief, “I know, you feel compelled to take what doesn't belong to you. That's who you are, a stealing soul. Go and act on your desires to steal!”

Now we have people saying, “I am attracted to the same sex. Since everyone says I am defined by my feelings, I now realize that’s just who I am.” And God does not say to them, “I know, you are gay/lesbian/transgender/bi-sexual. That’s who you are, so go act on it!” God calls everyone to the same standard: sexual holiness and integrity, which means keeping all sex within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman.

Adjusting one’s expectations. Accepting the truth that one’s attractions and desires may always be warped to some degree; they may always remain an area of weakness that can drive the disciple to a deeper level of dependence on God, which is essential for growing in relationship with Him. That may mean learning to live with a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7-10) instead of insisting that the only culturally acceptable change is a 180-degree shift in attractions from homosexual to heterosexual.

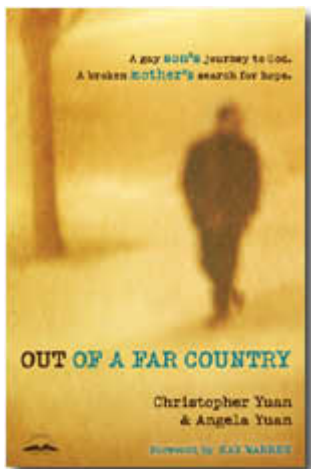
There is no “easy button.” Submitting to the process of sanctification means crucifying the flesh, and that’s *hard*. For any Christ-follower. And that’s where lasting change happens—as we are made into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19), as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). And that might, or might not, extend to our feelings. Regardless of who we are.

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The Power of a Mother's Prayers

Oct. 23, 2012

Jesus' most famous parable in Luke 15 tells the story of a rebellious young man usually dubbed "the Prodigal Son" who demanded his share of his father's inheritance while his dad was still alive, shameful enough, but then went off into "the far country" to squander it on riotous living. A modern-day prodigal and his mother have written their story, telling parallel stories from each one's perspective. The son's "far country" included drug dealing, living it up as a party animal, and gay promiscuity leading to a diagnosis of AIDS. But God brought both mother and son out of the far country to Himself.



Because I am privileged to walk with a number of people out of their own personal "far countries" of homosexuality, *Out of a Far Country* was a compelling read for me. But because I am also a mother, Angela Yuan's testimony of trusting Christ and then entrusting her beloved son into His hands again and again as a faithful prayer warrior, was deeply encouraging as well.

I was reminded of several lessons on prayer through this book.

First, *it's better to pray big than to try to micro-manage the outcome*. Angela continued to relinquish her own desires for her son to the Lord's better plan, which was for Christopher to walk in his true identity as a beloved child of a loving heavenly Father. When her son was angry and rebellious, she kept her eyes focused on the Lord instead of Christopher. She writes, "I started fasting and praying, asking God for wisdom

and discernment. I had no idea what it would look like, but I had a clear sense that Leon and I needed to step aside and get out of the way so that God could work in Christopher's life."

When Christopher was three months away from graduating from dental school, he learned he was expelled because of his foolish, illegal and sinful choices. His parents went to meet with the dean. Both the dean and the son expected the senior Yuans to put pressure on the school, but instead, Angela said, "Actually, it's not important that Christopher becomes a dentist. What's important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower. Leon and I have flown down to Louisville to tell you"—I looked over at Leon—"that we will support whatever decision you make. I only pray that my son will turn to God."

And he did. It didn't happen until he was incarcerated for his drug dealing, but God answered the far more important prayer.

Second, *let go of your time line*. We are such impatient people! We start praying and we want God to answer in the next day. Or week. Or month. But while He is at work behind the scenes, unscrambling the mess we tend to make of our lives, we don't think He is listening or answering. Angela prayed for years for God to bring Christopher out of the far country, and when He did, it was glorious. Christopher went from prison, where he met the Lord



Jesus, to Moody Bible Institute, and then graduate school at Wheaton College, and now has a worldwide ministry telling his/their story and bringing great glory to God in the process.

Third, *prayer is essential for the spiritual battles against the forces of darkness*. Christopher's choices to engage in ongoing sexual sin, drug use and wild living went hand-in-hand

with a spirit of rebellion and a strong delusion. Both of these involve demons, because his sinful choices opened up doorways to demonic influence. The Yuans' book provides plenty of examples of the spiritual blindness that resulted. But Angela's faithful time in the Word of God and intercessory prayer tore down the strongholds that held her son captive to his fleshly desires and his spiritual bondage. She turned a shower stall into her prayer closet, where she spent literally hours every day immersing herself in the Bible and prayer.



Fourth, *remain thankful*. When Christopher called his parents to tell them that he had been arrested and was in jail, Angela recognized this as the answer to her frequent prayer: *Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son out of that far country to you*. For the first time in years, she knew that where her son was, and that he was safe. She grabbed a length of adding machine tape and wrote down that blessing. And then, as God unfolded His glorious plan for drawing Christopher to Himself and then redeeming the pain of his rebellion, she kept adding to the blessing list over the years. When I heard her tell her story at an [Exodus International](#) conference several years ago, she held up her rolled-up blessings list and let it drop: it's about six feet long! Christopher tells me it's almost full on the second side as well. Choosing to focus on the ways in which God continues to bless us in the midst of suffering, developing an attitude of gratitude, keeps us from losing heart in a hard situation.

Fifth, *persistent prayer changes the one praying*. Desperation for her son drove Angela Yuan to an incredible intimacy with her Savior. Her daily time in His word and her gift of intercessory prayer drew her heart ever closer to Him. *Out of the Far Country* isn't just a story of a mother's and son's spiritual journey, it is an inspiration to "always pray and

not give up” (Luke 18:1).



This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_power_of_a_mothers_prayers

Responding To President Obama's Same-Sex Approval

President Obama recently gave public support to gay marriage. How do we respond from within a biblical worldview?

Some Christians have used this news event to highlight the way the church is blowing it on the opportunity to be “Jesus with skin on” to the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgender) community. This sentiment is especially prominent among people under forty who often have good friends who identify as gay.

There are two different issues that need to be kept separate: how the church treats gay-identifying *people*, and the church's position on the culture-affecting issue of gay identity and so-called gay marriage. The first provides an opportunity to

display a welcoming attitude of grace, which says, "We're glad you're here like the rest of us messed-up sinners who desperately need Jesus. He loves you and accepts you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way. Come embrace holiness with us as we learn it together." (And this message is just as true for drug and porn addicts, as well as Pharisaical holier-than-thou folks addicted to judgmental moralism.)

The other is about refusing to budge on what God has said about sexual sin, which does not change. Homosexuality is no more right, holy or acceptable today than it ever was in Bible times. Neither is heterosexual fornication, adultery, or pornography-driven lust. It's not just that sex outside of God's plan for marriage (which is limited to one man and one woman, per the created intent in Genesis 1 and 2) breaks His law—His rules are given as a gift to keep us from breaking our hearts.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matt. 10:34), and this issue is one of the areas of conflict He was bound to cause because His standard of holiness, and His call to live in it, is at odds with the human desire to do what we want regardless of what God thinks. Is homosexuality a sin? This is a simple question, but it needs a complex answer. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is usually not a choice; it's something people discover, usually with pain and horror. (Females, naturally more relational, can cultivate it and be emotionally seduced toward lesbianism, though, even with no previous leanings that way.)

But does it "fall short of the glory of God," one way Scripture defines sin (Rom 3:23)?

Certainly.

Same-sex attractions are a corruption of God's intention for healthy personal and sexual development, the result of the Fall and of living in a fallen world. I get this. I have lived

with polio ever since I was six months old. I didn't choose this disability, but is it a sin? It certainly falls short of the glory of God, and polio is part of living in a fallen world. It's one of the ways I experience the infection of sin. I did not choose the fallen-creation consequence of polio, yet I have to deal with it. My *responses* to it can be sinful, just as those who experience unwanted SSA have to deal with the fallen-creation consequence of homosexuality, but their responses to it can be sinful.

(By the way, there is no evidence of a genetic cause for homosexuality. The "born that way" myth cannot be supported biologically. But there are good reasons that many people end up with same-sex feelings; for more information, please read my articles in the [homosexuality section](#) of the Probe website, as well as articles on the Living Hope Ministries website at www.livehope.org.)

When people give in to the temptations of SSA and engage sexually with other men or other women, God's word has a very serious word for it: *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). But it's important to understand that the abomination is the act, not the people.

President Obama referred to the golden rule (treat others as you want them to treat you) as his rationale for supporting gay marriage:

[Michelle and I] are both practicing Christians and obviously this position may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it's also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated. And I think that's what we try to impart to our kids and that's what motivates me as president and I figure the most consistent I can be in being true to those precepts, the better I'll be as a as a dad and a husband and, hopefully,

the better I'll be as president.[{1}](#)

In 2008, in defending his current position against same-sex marriage but for civil unions, he said concerning people who might find his position controversial, "I would just refer them to the Sermon on the Mount, which I think is, in my mind, for my faith, more central than an obscure passage in Romans."[{2}](#)

Two things strike me about this. First, he's not consistent about his application of the golden rule; he's pro-abortion-but of course he doesn't want to be hacked to pieces without anesthesia, which is precisely what certain abortion procedures entail.

Second, choosing the golden rule over "an obscure passage in Romans" shows he doesn't understand that "the entirety of [God's] word is truth" (Ps. 119:160). Both the Golden Rule and the Romans 1 passage are true; it's not a choice between the two. Since he used to give lectures on Constitutional law at the University of Chicago, I doubt that he would ever use the term "an obscure phrase in the Constitution," because obscurity is about one's perception of importance, not the actual importance of a matter. To a Constitutional lawyer who respects the document, every phrase of the document is important. To a serious [true] Christ-follower, every word of His scriptures is important.

The issue of same-sex marriage isn't about people's right to live in committed relationships, to do life together. It's about demanding society's approval for "[the façade of normalcy](#)." It's about demanding approval for what God has called an abomination (the sexual act, not the people engaged in it).

Ryan Anderson wrote in the *National Review Online*,

"What's at issue is whether the government will recognize

such unions as marriages – and then force every citizen and business to do so as well. This isn't the legalization of something, this is the coercion and compulsion of others to recognize and affirm same-sex unions as marriages."[{3}](#)

American culture is definitely moving toward normalizing homosexuality, but from God's perspective it will never be normal or natural (Rom. 1:26-27). And it's God's perspective that matters.

Notes

1.

www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/

2. www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/

3. bit.ly/LGZ1z1

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Glee's Pro-Gay Theology

Feb. 28, 2012

Recently, the wildly popular TV show *Glee*'s Valentine's Day episode featured a group of religious students called the "God Squad" discussing whether they should accept money to sing love songs to gay people (their term). The writers had students spouting pro-gay theology that was doubtless quite persuasive to the majority of viewers who don't know the truth that counters the propaganda.

"They say that one out of every ten people are gay, and if that's true than that means one of the twelve apostles might

have been gay.”

That’s a very old, very inaccurate statistic from Alfred Kinsey. A more accurate estimate is in the 2-3% range.^[1] The idea that one of the twelve might have been gay is sheer speculation with no grounding in truth and no evidence for it, but it certainly planted the idea in the minds of millions of people to normalize it.

“The Bible says it’s an abomination for a man to lay down with another man. But we shared tents in Cub Scouts, and slept next to each other all the time. So that would make Cub Scouts an abomination.”

No. No, it wouldn’t.

What the Bible actually says is, “You shall not lie with a male **as one lies with a female**; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22). This passage is talking about same-sex intercourse, not guys in sleeping bags sharing a tent.

Further, it’s always important to look at the context of any verse. That same chapter contains prohibitions against sexual activity we still condemn today: incest, bestiality and adultery. Those who want to dismiss verses prohibiting same-sex relations as archaic usually (but not always!) won’t take a pro-incest, pro-adultery, or pro-bestiality stance. Neither should it be okay to take a pro-homosexuality stance.

My friend Randy Thomas had a powerful “lightbulb moment” concerning this verse. He writes,

“The Father brought back the memory of Ron, the first man I thought I loved, and me together as a couple. In my memory we were in an embrace and I saw the Lord standing next to us. We were oblivious to His presence and He was grieving. His grief was so bitter I could see Him shaking with tears as He looked upon us. I was immediately struck with grief that God was so grieved. It’s a grief I will never forget.”

"At that point I felt the Spirit asking me, 'Randy . . . what is the sin?' The only Scripture I knew was Leviticus 18:22 (that's only because it was on the signs that the Christians held up at pride parades and outside of clubs). I told the Lord that I didn't like that Scripture. But He persisted, 'What is the sin?' I thought through the verse again: 'When one man lies with another as a woman it is an abomination before the Lord,' (emphasis mine). The word 'it' jumped out at me. I sensed the Spirit asking, 'What is "it"?"

"I answered, 'A gender neutral pronoun?' I was a little surprised that in the middle of this powerful time the Holy Spirit would be giving me an English pop quiz. I felt Him say, 'EXACTLY!!!'

"Then my world fell apart over one little word. 'It' meant that I was not the abomination, Ron was not the abomination. It was the abomination – the act itself was keeping Ron and me looking toward each other and not to God for fulfillment of who we were and what God intended. For the first time in my life I knew that God is aware of every secret and not-so-secret thing I have done. Instead of sending hellfire and brimstone, He sent a grieving Savior to pay the price of my ignorance and sin.

"He forgave and redeemed me."

"You know what else the Bible says is an abomination—eating lobster, planting different crops in the same field, giving somebody a proud look. Not an abomination? Slavery. Jesus never said anything about gay people."

There are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Civil and ceremonial laws, such as those concerning religious sacrifices and dietary laws, were time-bound and limited to the people of Israel. They are no longer in force for a variety of reasons: first, all the OT sacrifices and ceremonies were given as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's

ministry and of His death, burial and resurrection. They are no longer necessary because they were the preparation for the Reality that has come. Second, the civil laws pertained to a nation of people who no longer exist. (The current nation of Israel is a political one, not the same as the group of OT people God called to follow Him alone as their Ruler.)

Moral laws, such the Ten Commandments and all the laws constraining sexual immorality, are not time-bound because they are rooted in the character of God. It is always sinful to have sex with someone you're not married to, regardless of gender.

Slavery, as ugly as it is, is not inherently unnatural the way homosexual practice is. Dr. Robert Gagnon, a theologian who has a breathtaking understanding of homosexuality and its attendant arguments, writes, "The Bible accommodates to social systems where sometimes the only alternative to starvation is enslavement. But it clearly shows a critical edge by specifying mandatory release dates and the right of kinship buyback; requiring that Israelites not be treated as slaves; and reminding Israelites that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt." [\[2\]](#)

We don't know that "Jesus never said anything about gay people"; it's quite possible that His comments on eunuchs in Matthew 19 included those who would have never sex with women because of their same-sex attractions.

Usually, the argument goes, "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." What He DID say about God's intention for His creation and sexuality in Mark 10:6-8 excludes homosexuality, along with other forms of sexual sin such as polyamory, incest and bestiality. Scripture powerfully indicates His intention for a male-female prerequisite for sexuality.

"Love is love" (so let's sing a love song to two lesbian students)

Is it? How would the “God Squad” feel about singing a love song to a woman committing adultery with one of their dads? How would they feel about a father paying them to sing a love song to the daughter he’s regularly raping while calling it love? Our culture is so anxious to justify anything by slapping the label of “love” on it that we dishonor the God who IS love: a sacrificial, others-centered, giving love that took Him to the cross to pay for the very sins that are being elevated and celebrated on network TV.

Notes

1. For citations, see my article on the Probe Ministries website “[Homosexual Myths](#).”

2.

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/03/my-take-the-bible-really-does-condemn-homosexuality/>

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/glees_pro-gay_theology

Helping Homosexuals Change? Yeah, Right.

ABC News recently did a story on presidential candidate Michele Bachmann’s family business, a Christian counseling center run by her husband, Dr. Marcus Bachmann. The focus of the story was a biased, “can you believe this?” exposé of the fact that the counselors help people who don’t want to be gay, address their unwanted homosexuality.

They interviewed two people, a man whose mother had taken him to the clinic when he came out as homosexual, and an

undercover reporter who brought two recording devices into the sessions with him. Neither man believed their homosexuality was changeable—and when it comes to the counseling office, if your mind is made up that something cannot be changed, guess what? It won't be.

The reporter used the now-familiar phrase “pray away the gay,” which is an effective and condescending dismissal of what actually happens when people do successfully shift their sexual orientation. (And I personally know a number of people who have experienced significant and lasting change in their orientation.) Some do successfully engage in reparative therapy, which addresses the emotional deficits in those who find themselves attracted to the same sex using purely psychological methods. But what is more effective is the transforming power of the gospel in the life of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. And, like all discipline of radical discipleship, which means saying “no” to our flesh and “yes” to the flow of Jesus’ resurrection power in our lives, it takes hard work over a period of years. There is no easy, 1-2-3 magic prayer to change the way we think and feel. Sanctification is a long process of cooperation with the Spirit of God.

The message our media pumps out today is that sexuality is fluid—except for homosexuality, which is fixed and can't be changed. This means it's okay to give into your secret cravings and come out as gay, in which case folks like Oprah will celebrate you embracing your “authentic self,” but it's not okay to say, “God didn't make me gay, and I choose to accept the identity HE gives me instead.” It's not okay to say, “I used to be gay and now I'm not.”

Which explains why there was an explosion of rage when Dr. Robert Spitzer, eminent professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, released the results of his [landmark 2001 study](#) that showed that change is possible in highly motivated individuals: rare, in his estimation, but possible. (Dr.

Spitzer had been the pro-gay lobby's hero since he spearheaded the American Psychiatric Association's removal of homosexuality from the DSM-IV manual, which is the psychiatrists' bible of mental disorders. That decision was the result of caving into political pressure, not the result of any research.)

The idea that people can experience change not only in their behavior but in their hearts is threatening to those committed to the idea of homosexuality as a fixed and unchangeable truth. (I personally believe the reason for their insistence is an understandable defensive reaction to trying to change their orientation on their own unsuccessfully, including attempting to "pray away the gay," which doesn't work. I have written about why that is, [here](#).)

Many of the loud voices insisting that homosexuality is not changeable hold to an unrealistic standard, that only a complete shift from 100% homosexual to 100% heterosexual constitutes change. I suggest that nowhere else do we hold to that standard: would we denounce a former alcoholic who has successfully lived for years in freedom from the destruction of alcohol, as not really changed if he thinks that a cold beer on a hot day still sounds good?

Dr. Spitzer's findings back up the message of the New Testament: that Jesus Christ changes the lives and thus the behavior of people caught in all kinds of sin. Remember this list of changed people in the church of Corinth?

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1

Corinthians 6:9-11)

Change is possible. That is part of the good news of the gospel. And, for the believer in Jesus, change is a normal and expected part of being a follower of Christ.

Even if the world laughs at the notion with a “can you believe this?” contempt. Can homosexuals change? It’s not “Yeah, right.” It’s “Yes! Amen!”

This blog post was originally published at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/helping_homosexuals_change_yeah_right on July 19, 2011.

What Bible?

May 29, 2013

Sometimes the only way you can respond to a statement is to ask, What Bible are they reading? That happened recently on my radio program when Penna Dexter and I were interviewing Joseph Farah of WorldNetDaily. He said that he allows commentators of various political persuasions to write and post their columns.

One of those columnists is Bill Press who recently wrote: “Nowhere in the Bible does God condemn homosexuality.” The predictable response from us was, What Bible is he reading? He goes on to argue that “nowhere in the Bible does God say marriage must only be between one man and one woman. After all, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.”

Actually, the argument goes the other way. If you legalize same-sex marriage, then sooner or later you will probably legalize polygamy. Every argument for redefining marriage to allow same-sex unions also is an argument for other marital

arrangements.

But the more important question is whether the Bible ever condemns homosexuality. Two passages in Leviticus call it an abomination. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Rome and the church in Corinth condemns homosexuality. Those are four verses for starters.

But of course, we can also understand the negative prohibitions by looking at the positive principles. Genesis 2 sets forth the biblical principle of a man and woman leaving father and mother to become one flesh. Jesus refers back to this foundational principle in Matthew 19 (which we also can find again in Mark 10).

And the Bible also teaches that this sexual sin has consequences not only for the individual but for the nation. Joseph Farah said: "This is about as serious as the Bible gets in condemnation. This is not only sin that affects the individuals involved, it's the kind of sin that has ramifications for the entire nation."

While it may be easy for Bible-believing Christians to shake their heads and ask, What Bible is he reading? But in this culture of biblical illiteracy, many people are likely to take the word of Bill Press rather than look it up in the Word of God. That's why we must firmly, but lovingly, teach God's Word. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.