

Homosexuality and Biblical Authority: A Response to Dr. Lee Jefferson

On November 4th, 2012, Dr. Lee Jefferson wrote an article for the Huffington Post titled: "What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gay Marriage?" This article was written in the wake of "a historic vote in the state of New York, pushed aggressively by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, (which) legalized the practice of same-sex marriage." In his article, Jefferson claims to show what the Bible *actually* says about homosexuality in light of those who utilize religion as a "bruising hammer" to drive home their message. However, it seems that the underlying and most prominent theme of his article can be summed up in the following statement:

If anything, this exercise questions whether we should develop stances based upon what the Bible "says." Simply put, the Bible is a complicated collection of documents that was never meant to "speak" to our contemporary situation, but groups often speak through the lens of the Bible and lob textual grenades on issues like same-sex marriage.

The previous sentiment about the Bible seems to set the foundation for his treatment and interpretation of the Bible as a whole; not just same-sex marriage. It is this that will be the primary focus of my conclusion. As a former student of Lee Jefferson's, I write this analysis with utmost respect and kindness, though I must have more respect and honor God and His Word.

Jefferson, an assistant professor of religion and Centre Scholar at Centre College, used four points to set forth his argument. His first point was that "the institution of marriage is a secular and social institution." He makes this point by alluding to ancient cultures, Roman laws, and the treatment of marriage in early Christianity, stating that "as the Christian church grew, marriage became more ecclesiastically governed." His conclusion in this section was that marriage, in today's culture and in the past, was not a religious institution. Rather, he states, it is a civil institution that even Adam and Eve would have had to adhere to in order to get a marriage license. Essentially, he purports that marriage is

not much more than a legal union or business transaction that happily links families together for no greater purpose than that.

This section failed to address one single aspect of the biblical view of marriage as set forth in scripture as a primarily religious ceremony, for the people of God. Jefferson, a professing Christian of the episcopal church (I believe), never addressed that the first marriage in scripture was indeed Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:22-25) and that the biblical theology of marriage is carried through the entire Bible to the book of Revelation, which ends with a marriage supper to of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:19). There was no mention of Ephesians 5:31-32 which remind readers, from Genesis 2:24 that, “‘a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” The apostle Paul links Genesis directly to his theology of marriage which represents the connection between Christ and His Church. The gospel of Jesus Christ is tied direction the motif and reality of marriage. Though non-believers participate in marriage ceremonies, God’s intention for marriage was always to point people to Christ and His marriage to the Church.

Jefferson’s second point is that “the Bible does not clearly endorse one form of marriage over another” claiming that Adam and Eve’s marriage in Genesis 2 is a “gender creation story, not a marriage story. This particular section is very short and leaves readers with very little information on “another” form of marriage found in the scripture. I would argue that this section is so short because there *is* no other form of marriage mentioned in the Bible to compare heterosexual marriage to. It would seem that Christians argue from silence that there was no gay marriage, but there is far too much written about marriage in the Bible to assume that God simply forgot or assumed that gay marriage would just happen. As shown in my analysis of the first point, the theme of marriage is found throughout the Bible. In light of God’s people, he forbid marriage to nonbelievers because it would lead to their corruption (2 Cor 6:14, Ex 34, Dt. 7, etc.). The principle here is that marrying outside of the faith would lead to

idolatry, which is a sin that King Solomon fell into (1 Kings 11:3). There are deeply spiritual roots of marriage and these roots can be further explored by reading The Song of Solomon which displays Christ's love for His bride (who is emphatically portrayed as a female).

Jefferson's third point is that "the Biblical arguments against same-sex marriage are not proffered from texts that deal with marriage, but from texts that purportedly deal with same-sex orientation." He states that one has to "hunt" to find biblical texts dealing with deal with same sex practice. He notes Jesus' lack of discussion on the topic as another reason that same-sex practice is "a topic of little interest to biblical authors". He then provides very brief (and scant) discussions of Genesis 19 and Leviticus 20.

Jefferson does very little in his third point to discuss these biblical texts in their fullness. I admit, this is likely due to the short nature of such an article. However, he fails to apply principles of biblical theology as he studies these texts. For example, in Genesis 19, he claims that the text is mainly and mostly about the motif of hospitality. This motif is certainly *part* of the story. There is more, though. In Genesis 18:22-33, Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah because God heard "the outcry against them" for their sin was "very grave" (Genesis 18:20-21). Hospitality may have been one of the issues that God was angry about, but as seen in verses 22-33, there were not even 10 righteous people in those cities. In light of Genesis 18, it is clear that homosexuality is part of the wickedness of those cities. These men tried to rape angels of God. Would those angels have consented to homosexual intercourse with the men had they been more hospitable? Certainly not! Other biblical references to Sodom and Gomorrah such as Ezekiel 16:49-50, 2 Peter 2:6-9, and Jude 7 mention lust, greed, haughtiness, sensual conduct, sexual immorality, perversion, fornication, and going after strange flesh (or unnatural desire).

In light of the comment that the gospels do not specifically mention homosexuality, the question must be asked, "does Jesus address every sin in the bible?" Jesus did not address incest,

adultery, bestiality, pornography, drug use, etc. Of course, Jesus addresses principles related to these things such as sexual purity, sobriety, and purity of thoughts. This “silence” argument would allow for many so-called “gray-area” sins to be acceptable.

In looking at Leviticus 19, Jefferson states that “The codes make the Israelites unique from their neighbors, and they reflect a particular time and place in Israelite history.” I agree that the laws in Leviticus were specifically for Israel. However, these laws are in context of sexual immorality as God sought to protect His people from incurring His wrath against their sinful actions and idolatry. There is much exhortation in the New Testament on avoiding sexual immorality. Just take a look at the book of 1 Corinthians. With this view of the law, there are numerous abominations in the Bible which were unique to the Israelites. Proverbs 6:16-19 speak of pride, lying, murder, evil hearts, and evil actions, bearing false witness, and sowing discord among God’s people as abomination. If the Supreme Court of the United States made those things legal, does that impact how God views these “abominations” since we are not Jewish? If there were a New Testament text that lifted the ban on sexual immorality, this discussion would be over. However, this did not happen because sexuality is so closely related to monogamous, heterosexual marriage with procreation as a primary goal (Genesis 1:28, 9:7)

Jefferson’s last point is that “any reference to same-sex practice by a Biblical writer or a Greco-Roman writer has no knowledge or understanding of the concept of “same-sex orientation.” He states there is no “Hebrew or Greek cognate word in the Biblical text to reflect the modern term ‘same-sex orientation or homosexuality’.” He makes mention of the Greek terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* and their translations as sodomites and male prostitutes as used in 1 Corinthians 6:9. He then admits that these terms are placed in the context of “ALL deviant sexual and immoral behavior, not just that of a same-sex variety”. In speaking of Romans 1:18-32, he states that same-sex behavior was a consequence of the root sin of idolatry and that it is “unclear whether it truly is a condemnation of a specific practice”.

Jefferson's fourth point is the most lamentable of his 4 points. It is also, in my opinion, the most contradictory (or at least shifty) point of his entire argument. Though there is no cognate for *homosexual orientation* there are terms for *homosexual* behavior. The word *malakoi* is used to describe effeminate men who are the passive partner in a homosexual act [1]. The word *arsenokoitai* is used twice in the Bible to describe people who "abuse or defile themselves with mankind" and "lie with a male as with a female" [2]. These words are indeed used in a list that condemns "ALL deviant sexual and immoral behavior". Those who commit these behaviors will "not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9). Furthermore, for some Christians, these behaviors represented their past before they were "washed" and "sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11). Why would a Christian advocate or participate willingly in such behavior? Why would God consider this behavior as acceptable and worthy of rejoicing?

Jefferson's treatment of Romans 1:18-32 is also unacceptable for the sheer fact that his conclusion from this text contradicts the text itself. The idolatry of the ungodly and unrighteous men made them recipients of God's wrath. The text is clear that "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts...dishonorable passions... to a debased mind to do what ought not be done" (Romans 1:24-28). If God gave them up to what ought not be done and they committed homosexual acts, the only fair and accurate understanding of this text is that homosexual sin is of lust, is dishonorable, and ought not be done. Furthermore, idolatry led to all sin, as seen in Romans 1:29-31. Paul finishes by stating that "though they knew God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:32). It is very clear that there is condemnation of many specific practices including homosexuality.

He concludes by stating that "The above discussions will likely never satisfy any opponent of gay rights or of same-sex marriage to any degree." He discusses that many of his undergraduate students "question the validity of basing every aspect of their lives entirely on what the Bible 'says'". He then makes some very bold statements in regard to the authority and inerrancy of scripture which must be

addressed. First he says, “perhaps we should treat the Bible less like an authoritative contract with God and understand it more as a human-authored, divinely-inspired, document that arouses a life of faith”. He then says, “If only we quit focusing on what the Bible didactically "says" and converse with the text in its broader cultural context. Then one can realize the multivalent value of such a book that a narrow reading cannot service.” Each of these statements points specifically to his view of the Bible and its authority in the lives of Christians and non-Christians.

Jefferson’s conclusion seems to say that he believes the Bible is inspired by God. However, if the Bible is only meant to “arouse a life of faith” that does not view the Bible as the ultimate authority in its original context, he does not actually believe in the inerrancy of scripture at all. Furthermore, if we are to ignore what the Bible “says” and read it out of its original context and into “its broader cultural” context, he does not have a view of the Bible’s authority and inerrancy. The Bible indeed speaks on homosexuality, whether we like it or not. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 state that “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Jesus also states that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Therefore, we MUST “insert” the Bible into this debate by reflecting upon the biblical text itself.

The greatest concern in this article is not same-sex marriage or behavior; though these things are indeed sinful and are addressed in scripture. The greatest concern is that a professor with a Master’s of Arts and Ph. D. in religion would treat the biblical text in such a way. The greatest concern is that spiritually immature and unsound undergraduate students have and will look to this biblical “scholar” and “doctor” to provide a biblical view of current social and theological issues. The greatest concern is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is being compromised by some who have “crept in unnoticed long ago” and “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). The greatest concern is that professing Christians will now tell a homosexual person to continue in

their sin although the Bible clearly says they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The greatest concern is that the love of God in His gospel is being perverted and misused to deceive people into living a life of unrepentant sexual sin.

My prayer is that people will read the Bible for themselves. My prayer is that the true gospel will continue to be preached in spite of this new gospel which gives a license to sin. My prayer is that heterosexual and homosexual sinners will repent and believe the gospel. My prayer is that false teachers will repent and teach the truth. My prayer is that I will see the sin in my life before I pick up a stone to throw at homosexuals. My prayer is that I will remain firm in the faith and never bend under the weight of social pressure to conform. My prayer is that I will love God and love my neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). My prayer is that if you are not saved, that you would repent and believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ for your salvation. My prayer is that if you are saved, that you would take up and read the Bible. It is vital in these trying times!

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