

# Does the Bible require that marriage be limited to one man and one woman?

Four Case Studies

By Aaron Milavec

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The four case studies below were designed as a workshop in a research setting. They could also be used as a lesson plan for college students. The material is divided into four case studies. One can use any of the case studies independently. One can change the order in which the case studies are used. If you want to share with me how you plan to use these case studies, communicate to me at [Milavec@churchonfire.net](mailto:Milavec@churchonfire.net)

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## Case 1: Does the Bible require that marriage be limited to one man and one woman?

When public discourse first considered the possibility of giving legal protection to same-sex unions, most Christian communities were alarmed at this because they judged that the traditional ideal of marriage was under attack.



[Dr. Andreas J. Kostenberger](#), prolific author and research theologian, took offense at the very fact that civil discourse was entertaining to give further recognition and protection to same-sex unions at a time when traditional marital unions

were in decline. Here are the words of Dr. Kostenberger explaining himself:

#1 Marriage and the family are institutions under siege today, and only a return to the biblical foundation of these God-given institutions will reverse the decline of marriage and the family in our culture today.

#2 In the book of Genesis, we read that God in the beginning created first a man (Adam) to exercise dominion over his creation and subsequently a woman (Eve) as the man's "suitable helper" (Gen 2:18, 20). Then, the inspired writer remarks, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 ESV). This verse sets forth the biblical pattern as it was instituted by God at the beginning: one man is united to one woman in matrimony, and the two form one new natural family.

#3 The Bible makes clear that, at the root, marriage and the family are not human conventions based merely on a temporary consensus and time-honored tradition. Instead, Scripture teaches that family was God's idea and that marriage is a divine, not merely human, institution. The implication of this truth is significant indeed, for this means that humans are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage and the family in any way they choose but that they are called to preserve and respect what has been divinely instituted (<https://www.frc.org/brochure/the-Bibles-teaching-on-marriage-and-family>)).

The passion and the insights that are voiced by Dr. Andreas J. Kostenberger have, at first glance, a certain seductive simplicity and appeal:

- Gen 2, as Dr. Kostenberger interprets it, gives us God's original template for marriage that is binding at all times and in all places.
- Kostenberger firmly believes that the appeal of same-sex marriages will disappear as soon as civil society comes to recognize that marriage is a divine institution and that "humans are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage."
- Kostenberger is tacitly declaring that civil institutions are not free to ignore God's universal template for marriage.

## Peeling Back the Hidden Layers in Gen 2

The moment that one begins to examine the details of Gen 2, however, we immediately notice that God is not preoccupied with instituting “marriage.” Rather, the Lord God is preoccupied with creating an extraordinary garden. Then, by way of getting a helper for this enterprise, the Lord God fashions out of the clay “*adam*.” [Nowhere does it say that \*adam\* is a male or that “Adam” is his proper name.](#)

- The capitalization of “Adam” in English Bibles is thus misleading.
- Moreover, if *adam* was a proper name then we might have expected that this name would be used by others in the book of Genesis. This does not happen.
- Rather, [the Hebrew term אָדָם \(transliterated: \*hā-’ā-dām\*\), means simply “out of the earth.” \[Examining Gen 2:7 makes this clear.\]\(#\)](#)

This being the case, I would suggest that the Hebrew term might better be translated into English as “earthling” which nicely suggests “origins from the earth,” therefore certainly not an extraterrestrial being or an angel (as some have wrongly claimed). In what follows, I will translate [אָדָם](#) as “*adam*” (meaning “earthling”). The lower-case “a” signals that this is not a proper name but a descriptive term.

## Contrasting Gen 2-3 with Gen 1

Gen 1 and Gen 2-3 have an entirely different mood and internal logic. According to Gen 1, *adam* is formed late (on the sixth day) and is immediately identified as having the “image and likeness” of his/her Maker. So, too, in Gen 1 *adam* is given dominion over the rest of creation. Adam is given only one mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” ([Gen 1:28](#)). God blesses the birds and the fish by calling them to “be fruitful and multiply” ([Gen 1:22](#)) as well. Birds have a sort of dominion over the air. Fish have dominion over the sea. But *adam* and his offspring have dominion over the fish and birds. Keep in mind that this dominion does not mean that *adam* can kill them or eat them because God clearly limits *adam*'s food intake to seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees ([Gen 1:29](#)).

According to Gen 2-3, *adam* is formed early when there are, as yet, no plants, animals, or birds. Gen 2:5 explains that there were are no plants because (a) Yahweh has not yet caused it to rain and (b) [adam was not there to cultivate the ground](#). Then, (a) a watery mist covers the earth (Gen 2:6) and (b) *adam* is formed from the earth and endowed with breath ([Gen 2:7](#)). Only when these conditions are met does "Yahweh cause to grow from the earth every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food" ([Gen 3:9](#)). The Garden of Eden at this point is much more like a tree orchard or a desert oasis than a vegetable garden.



While *adam* (the earthling) is being [trained as a cultivator by the Lord God](#), *adam* is stricken with loneliness. Gen 1 presents God as declaring, at the close of each of the first five days, "And God saw that it was **good**." At the close of the sixth day, one finds a summation: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was **very good**" (1:31). In Gen 2:18, however, for the first time, God expresses his displeasure: "It is **not good** that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper (עֵזֶר [‘ê-zer](#)) as his partner (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ [kə-neġ-dōw](#))."

*The term ‘ezer, “help(er),” can accommodate a range of nuances. It is used in the OT most often [13x] in reference to God as a human being’s “help” and once in reference to false gods in whom people wrongly trust. It can also be used [2x] of people helping others. Usually the implication is that the “help” brings something that the one needing help lacks. . . . What may be confidently concluded based on the wording of Genesis 2:18 and 2:20 is that the woman [“helper” 7x] was not created as an inferior but as an equally human person sharing the man’s nature while being in some respects different from him ((Robert M. Bowman, Jr., “Genesis and the Definition of Marriage,” paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society annual convention, 17 Nov 2015)).*

Clearly the term [‘ê-zer](#) does not imply a subordinate position since the term most frequently is used to specify divine aid. Since the *‘ezrâ* (*feminine form of ‘ê-zer*) also solves the issue of

“being alone,” the meaning intended here for [‘ê-zer](#) must also imply companionship. What is astonishing is that the companionship and powerful aid of the Lord God is judged as insufficient; *adam* needs the companionship and powerful aid of someone like himself ([kə-neġ-dōw](#)).

Seemingly God is entirely satisfied with “being alone”; hence, Gen 1-3 never insinuates that God undertook creation by way of finding companionship for himself. When it comes to *adam*; consequently, God appears to be uncertain as to how to find a suitable companion for *adam*. So God begins to create “from the earth” various birds and animals (2:19) in much the same way that he originally created *adam* (2:7). After each such creation, God brings his latest brainchild to *adam* to see “what he would name it.”

Clearly God is here using a trial and error method. Adam names each falcon, lizard, wolf, etc. following upon his own experiences with them. It would make no sense for the Lord God to name them. From God’s perspective, he is trying to make a [‘ê-zer](#) for *adam* (and not for himself). This endeavor must go on for months and years. Without actually saying it, the inspired author is suggesting that God is clearly *adam*’s [‘ê-zer](#) in this prolonged enterprise.

### **The God who humbles himself to serve *adam***

The Lord God is here functioning at the service of his creation. This is important to note. In the Ancient Middle East, it was usual to find “gods” functioning as powerful tyrants. So, too, it was normal to find “gods” [bent upon thwarting the needs of humans](#). Gen 2, in contrast, presents the Lord God of Israel (“Yahweh”) as engaged in an open-ended exploration designed to benefit *adam*. Thus, while *adam* was originally created by the Lord God to serve him by cultivating his majestic garden, the onset of loneliness demonstrates that the Lord God, as an afterthought, can enthusiastically harness his creative powers in the service of *adam*.

From this we can quickly see that the Baltimore Catechism begins on the wrong foot when it declares that God created us “to know him, to love him, and to serve him.” Thus, Gen 2 can assist us in correcting an unbalanced theology of God at the same time that it can liberate us from thinking, along with Dr. Kostenberger, that God’s purpose in Gen 2 is to define marriage.

Reading between the lines of Genesis, one can imagine that only after several thousand failures God gradually comes to the realization that another novel animal or bird is not likely to be the companion needed by *adam*. A Plan B is needed. So God puts *adam* into a deep sleep and pulls "from his side" the female while leaving behind the male. [There is no question here of just taking "a rib."](#) This demonstrates that *adam*, from the very beginning, was an amalgamation of both male and female. If one looks at [Gen 1:27](#), one finds this:

*So God created humankind ( הָאָדָם [hā-’ā-dām](#)) in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them [NRSV].*

*So God created man ( הָאָדָם [hā-’ā-dām](#)) in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them [KJV].*

The English of both of these translations obscures the original Hebrew. In the Hebrew text, God is creating a single entity, the "earthling" ( הָאָדָם [hā-’ā-dām](#)) found in Gen 2. The English suggests that God created a plurality (Adam and Eve or even "humankind"). The insertion of "them" into the text further enforces the notion that God created "male and female" as two separate beings. The Hebrew text, however, clearly uses the singular noun throughout: "God shaped *adam* in (his) image; in the image of God he created, male and female, he created [him]."

*Adam ("earth creature," from the Hebrew adamah) is not really a proper name. Nor is a proper name ever conferred upon the creature. This is not a new insight. Almost forty years ago, in "[The Image of God in Man – Is Woman Included?](#)", the distinguished historian of ideas Maryanne Cline Horowitz noted: the dual-gendered nature of Adam "is completely distorted by Bible translations which consistently capitalize the term as a proper name Adam." (( <https://forward.com/scribe/356899/was-adam-a-hermaphrodite/>))*



Once we recognize that *adam* is a single entity and that the image of God is a single entity, we do away with the problem of how Adam could be shaped in the image of God and then Eve could be shaped in the image of God without making them identical twins. What the Hebrew text has in mind is that God's image is an amalgamation of male-female; accordingly, *adam*'s image is an amalgamation of male-female. This is why I emphasized earlier that *adam* in the Hebrew text is not identified as "male." Nor, as it turns

out, is God exclusively "male." Both have an "image" which is both female and male.

Notice also that Gen 1:27 does not find any conflict in speaking of the "image" of God here even though God is sometimes thought of as entirely ethereal and consequently has no "image" whatsoever. The rabbis discussed this question thoroughly. They even told the story that after God created *adam*, the angels could not tell the difference between *adam* and the Lord-God because they were, in fact, identical twins. When God noticed their confusion, he put *adam* into a deep sleep. Then the angels immediately knew the difference for they were well aware that God does not sleep.

### **Gender superiority in the order of creation**

Notice also that this reading of Gen 1:27 also does away with the gender superiority of the male that results when Gen 2 is read as indicating that Adam was created first and Eve was created much later. If that were the case then Gen 1:27 would be inconsistent because Gen 2 makes plain that only *adam* (a singular entity) was created on the sixth day and this *adam* (a singular entity) was shaped in the image (singular) of God. Gen 1:27 also side-steps the modern notion that "if God is male then being male is divine." God's image is clearly an amalgamation of male-female. Hence, our English translations of Gen 1:27 needs to safeguard the notion that God's image is male-female and that *adam*'s image is male-female as well.

The narrative etiology of Genesis accounts for why the attraction between the male and female is supremely superior to the parent-child bond. This superiority (according to Gen 1-2) is due to the fact that the male-female bond preexists in God himself and, when it comes to creation, this same male-female bond was implanted into *adam*. Many sages and theologians have wanted to equate the “image of God” that resides in humans to “our intelligence,” “our free wills,” or “our immortal souls.” There may be some truth in these speculations, but this is not the message of Genesis. According to Genesis, the “image and likeness” that God shares with *adam* is the singular amalgamation of the male-female. When the narrator faces his hearers, he shares the focal point of his understanding: “Therefore [having heard my narrative, you can now clearly understand why it is that] a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (2:24). In traditional marriages, it is the wife who leaves her parents. Hence, we are being asked here to think of cases where specifically “a man” leaves his parents in order to bind himself to “his wife.”

Dr. Kostenberger falls into the trap of reading gender superiority into Gen 2. He writes:

“Scripture is clear that wives are to submit to their husbands and to serve as their "suitable helpers," while husbands are to bear the ultimate responsibility for the marriage before God (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; see also Genesis 2:18, 20)”

(<https://www.frc.org/brochure/the-Bibles-teaching-on-marriage-and-family>). Kostenberger illustrates how seemingly insignificant translation errors lend support to ideas of God and ideas of women that run directly against what we have found in the Hebrew text of Gen 1-2.

### **The meaning of “bone of my bones”**

Once God puts *adam* into a deep sleep and “surgically” separates the female from the male and their bodies have time to heal, God brings the newly shaped female and presents her to the “surgically” altered *adam*. We have to presume that Adam has to take time to examine her and to get to know her--just as he did for all the other creatures that God presented to him earlier. Adam then declares God’s success: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman (אִשָּׁה), for “out of *adam*” (as opposed to "out of the earth") this one was taken" (2:23). The precise meaning of “bone of my bones” can be captured from its usage



([Genesis 29:14](#), [Genesis 37:27](#); [Jdg 9:2](#); [2 Samuel 5:1](#); [2 Samuel 19:12-13](#); [1 Chronicles 11:1](#)).

However, I risk suggesting that, in Gen 2:23, it must include this meaning, “Yahoo! You’ve done it. Here at last is a companion like myself--someone capable of understanding me and embracing my loneliness.”

Later, in Gen 27, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” takes on a special meaning. Let me explain. Abraham and Sarah leave their homeland and travel to Ur, as God instructed them. Isaac marries Rebekah, but when it comes time for Isaac to marry, Rebekah says to her husband, “I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these . . . , what good will my life be to me?” (27:46) So Isaac sends his son, Jacob, to the land where Rebekah’s brother Laban lives with the instruction that he is to find his future wife among the daughters of Laban. After a long and dangerous journey, as Jacob gets close to his destination, he stops at a well and inquires about his uncle Laban. Just then Rachel and her flock arrive:

*Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud (29:10-11).*

If Jacob had not been so overwhelmed with joy and tears at meeting Rachel, he might well have said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Then Laban learns of his nephew’s approach:

*When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" (29:13-14)*

Laban, overcome with emotion, runs to him and then embraces and kisses him. After hours of good food and good conversation, Laban exclaims, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” This is more or less what *adam* blurted out after he had a chance to come to know the “woman” that God had pulled from his side. In both cases, there is the affirmation of kinship, but there is

also the mutual sense that “I love what you love and I hate what you hate.” Both Laban and Jacob live their lives as misfits within the foreign culture that surrounds them. The two men find strength and affirmation in each other.

The same thing, of course, can be said to characterize the bond between *adam* and the “woman” God made for him. Notice that *adam* does not welcome the “woman” as his cook or housekeeper. Nor is she perceived as someone strong and ready to share the task of cultivating God's garden. Nor is she assessed as having lovely breasts and broad hips that would serve well for child-bearing and delight the eyes of any man. On the contrary, *adam* assesses her as just the right companion needed to keep his “loneliness” at bay. Adam blurts out: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” And, just as *adam* was fond of naming all the other gifts of God, *adam* names her אִשָּׁה which means “out of *adam*.” Here again this is not her proper name but a descriptive name very much like *adam* which means “out of clay.” The English rendering of אִשָּׁה as “Woman” entirely obscures the meaning of the Hebrew.

The biblical author inserts a footnote: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” ([Gen 2:24](#)). This, of course, is not *adam*'s thought since, in effect, *adam* never had any experience of having or leaving a human father or mother. Nor does anything in the narrative of Gen 2 suggest that *adam* is seeking a “wife.” So, in effect, the editor is thinking of his readers here and addressing their situation. Every man knows that his parents are not sufficient to satisfy his longing for human connectedness. That's why every man has to go out and find himself a suitable “wife” and to cling to her with all his might. This is the case of Jacob sketched above: He leaves his father and mother for a full twenty years in order that he might cling to his wives and be a companion and business partner to his father-in-law. Then, with fear and trembling, he contemplates returning home.

Notice that the narrator's footnote does not say, “This is to make clear that God wants all marriages to bring together one man and one woman.” Dr. Kostenberger earnestly wants Gen 2 to say this, but, as we see from the text itself, the interests of the sacred text lie elsewhere. They don't talk about marriage at all. And when Genesis does get around to discussing marriages, the case of Jacob demonstrates the supreme importance of bonding with someone who shares your

God: "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women" (Gen 28:1, 6). As things turn out, Laban tricks Jacob into marry both his daughters. [Polygamy is the rule rather than the exception](#); hence, Jacob never objects on the basis of the "one man and one woman" rule that Dr. Kostenberger discovers within the text. Jacob finds that his two wives are consumed by jealousy and that both of them insist that he take their female slaves and impregnate them as surrogate wombs ready to give Jacob the dozen sons that he so earnestly deserves (Gen 29:30-30:15). Here, again, the "one man and one woman" rule of Dr. Kostenberger gets diluted even further. Neither Jacob nor the biblical narrator ever voice a single "moral objection" based upon "what God originally wanted."

The bonding between the first male and first female cannot be imagined to take place due to sexual intercourse. In the ancient world, intercourse, in and of itself, only occupied a brief amount of time and carried with it no emotional overlays beyond that of a farmer planting his seed (Latin: semen) in the fertile womb. Furthermore, while some few couples might have known something of the "joys of sex," most acts of sex were initiated by men without any foreplay and they were terminated as soon as their own selfish purposes had been served. Sex with slaves and prostitutes was commonplace, and no wife in Genesis ever made a fuss about such things to her husband. The female orgasm was probably as rare as hen's teeth. The only joy of sex known by most women was the conception and birth of a son. The greatest curse was infertility and women suffered immensely.

So, Gen 2 never falls into the trap of thinking, as some teenagers might be prone to do today, that "lots of sex" is the sure cure for loneliness. In the ancient world, the romantic ideal of sexuality and true love were a distant dream waiting for another two and a half thousand years to pass before romantic feelings could be cultivated. Sexual intercourse was quite often required of men and women purely due to family and tribal and social status obligations (as we shall shortly discover). The same thing holds true even today—but to a much lesser degree.

## **Conclusion**

Gen 2 says nothing about God establishing a permanent template for one-man and one-woman marriages. What we know as "marriage" has taken many forms and shapes in the course of

history. In Genesis, one finds some exemplary one-man and one-woman marriages (Isaac and Rebekah, for instance). But one never finds the inspired, biblical narrator saying, “Ah, at last, this is the sort of marriage that God endorses more than all the others.”

Lessons learned from Gen 2 might include the following:

- Having the companionship of God in a fabulous garden is not sufficient; *adam* needs human companionship just as vitally as he needs divine companionship.
- Gen 2 makes it clear that God did not deliberately create a longing for human companionship in *adam*. On the contrary, neither God nor humans can predict what deep longing will take over in their lives. When a particular deep longing does show up for *adam*, consequently, even God can be taken by surprise.
- God uses his trial and error ingenuity by way of searching for a practical solution, but it is *adam* who has to confirm *what actually works from within his human perspective*.

So marriage can never be exclusively a divine institution as scholars like Dr. Kostenberger want us to think. And nowhere does Gen 2 claim that it is. In fact, if one reads the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, there is not one single time or place where Gen 2 is held up as the “exclusive” or “best” template for all of the hundreds of marriages described therein. Thus Kostenberger is sadly and completely wrong when he concludes that one size fits all and that Gen 2 demonstrates that God deliberately designed marriage as a bonding of one man and one woman. Dr. Kostenberger goes completely haywire when he rashly decrees that “humans are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage and the family in any way.” What a strange message this is! The God speaking and acting in Gen 2 surely is not attached to anything remotely like this.

In fact, it is just the reverse. Adam takes the initiative by revealing the corrosive effect of his being alone. God responds by taking his loneliness seriously. When God begins his trial and error approach, God brings each of his new creations to *adam* and counts on him to fairly evaluate each of them one by one. God honors *adam*’s judgment at every point. He expects *adam* to inform him regarding what works and what does not work. Never, at any point, does God overwhelm *adam* by insisting, for example, that “the koala bears I created are just what you

need.” Nor does God downplay *adam*’s distress. He never says, “Be a man! Get a grip on yourself. Master your loneliness or it will master you!” Furthermore, God does not pull rank and resort to threats by saying, “Get this straight! I make the rules here. You don’t. You have to do it my way or else I’m going to give you a taste of my divine wrath.” Rather, God speaking to me in Gen 2 appears to be saying, “Thanks for revealing your sense of isolation to me. It is certainly not good that you feel so alone. Let’s see what we can work out together to help resolve this.”



All in all, I have no investment in personally correcting and embarrassing Dr. Kostenberger. Rather, I want to offer my sober reflections to those Christians who are despairing and suffering from the well-meaning but ill-informed theological judgments of men like Dr. Kostenberger. And, to those who emphatically believe that Dr. Kostenberger has found the answer to the modern problem of failing marriages, I want to offer “true believers” an opportunity to imagine that just maybe the voice of God that they hear inside their heads is not the voice of Lord God

that speaks out from the inspired and inspiring narratives of Gen 2.

## **Case 2: Matthew Vines, a fervent believer wrestling with loneliness**

Matthew Vines grew up in an Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Kirkwood, Missouri. When he slowly came to the realization that he had a homosexual orientation, he was horrified by the fact that his Presbyterian church offered him no route whereby he might gain God's blessing for his sexuality. Here is the message he received from his church:

We affirm God's design for the two sexes — male and female — and believe that each is a glorious gift from God. Our sexuality is meant to be offered back to Him. For some, this means joining in a one-man, one-woman marriage — for procreation, union and mutual delight. For others, this means celibacy which allows for undivided devotion to Christ. Sexual expression is designed for the marital relationship, and homosexual lust<sup>[1]</sup> and behavior are among the sexual sins that are outside God's created intent and desire for us.

Vines, at the age of 21, realized that his divine salvation relied upon his willingness to accept God's plan that sexual intimacy was exclusively reserved to heterosexual partners bound together in marriage. Since Vines knew that he was not attracted to women, he faced the bleak prospect of trying “reparative therapies”<sup>[2]</sup> and praying to God for a miracle that would “transform his sexual appetites.”<sup>[3]</sup> Should these options fail, he knew full well that he would be forced to maintain a lifelong celibacy, even though he honestly recognized that he was not naturally inclined in this direction either.

Shaken by these bleak prospects for his future, Vines deliberately interrupted his college studies at Harvard (2008-2010) because he knew that he had to consult with biblical experts and come to a deeper understanding of why God opposes homosexuality and why God has no blessing to give to men like himself.

After his father approved of his six-page summation of his biblical research, Vines took his discoveries and presented them to the elders in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in his home

town. He met privately with many of the church members as well. And here is what he discovered:

Despite my best efforts and the support of my family and some of our friends, our broader church community proved unreceptive to my message. Months of grueling, emotionally draining conversations with church leaders and members produced next to nothing in terms of progress. So eventually I left, dejected and depressed, but also determined to make change. Several months later, I found a church in town that was brave enough to offer me a public platform to speak about the issue. . . .[\[4\]](#)

Matthew Vines' entire family deciding to leave their local church as well. They didn't do this in anger or frustration. They did it because they wanted to express, first and foremost, their solidarity with their son or with their brother. They also did this, I would conjecture, because they were increasingly suspicious, thanks to the insights of their son, that there might be something drastically mistaken in the traditional Bible interpretations and that the "anti-gay gospel" was indeed destructive to the spiritual and psychological well-being of Matthew. By extension, they might have conjectured that if the "anti-gay gospel" is poisonous to their son, it would follow, as the night follows the day, that this "gospel" might be toxic to other youths[\[5\]](#) wrestling with their sexual orientation as well. Here is how Vines expresses this in his own words:

Could it be true? Could it really be that this holiest of books, which contains some of the most beautiful writings and inspiring stories known to mankind, along with the unparalleled teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, also happens to require the emotional and spiritual destruction of sexual minorities? **For any of us who learned to love the Jesus who called the little children to him, whose highest law was that of love, and who was a fierce defender of the downtrodden and the outcast, this simply did not seem possible.**[\[6\]](#)

Thus, the suspicion was that the teachings of Jesus invalidate the “anti-gay gospel” and that, in the case of homosexuality, false teaching has distorted the biblical texts such that “Scripture is used to manipulate. God is used as a weapon.”<sup>[7]</sup>



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**Matthew Vines use of Scriptures is quite sophisticated. Vines is not only casting doubt on the “anti-gay gospel” and the texts used to support it, he is also discovering overlooked texts that construct a solid basis for an eventual acceptance of homosexual unions. Here is an excellent example:**

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth, plants, animals, man, and everything in the earth. And He declares everything in creation to be either good or very good — except for one thing. In Genesis 2:18, God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” And yes, the suitable helper or partner that God makes for Adam is Eve, a woman. And a woman is a suitable partner for the vast majority of men — for straight men. But for gay men, that isn’t the case. For them, a woman is not a suitable partner. And in all of the ways that a woman is a suitable partner for straight men—**for gay men, it’s another gay man**<sup>[8]</sup> **who is a suitable partner.**



And the same is true for lesbian women. For them, it is another lesbian woman who is a suitable partner. But the necessary consequence of the traditional teaching on homosexuality is that, even though gay people have suitable partners, they must reject them, and they must live alone for their whole lives, without a spouse or a family of their own.

We are now declaring good the very first thing in Scripture that God declared not good: for the man to be forced to be alone. **And the fruit that this teaching has borne has been deeply wounding and destructive.**<sup>[9]</sup>

### Conclusion

Notice how Vines begins by carefully examining the text of Gen 1-3. He isolates God's declaration, "It is not good for a man to be alone," as his key concern. But then he shows that the "anti-gay gospel" frustrates God's declaration in two ways:

1. Gay people know very well that God has created for them "suitable partners," yet the "anti-gay gospel" declares that same-sex partners are everywhere and always unsuitable;
2. Likewise, the "anti-gay gospel" declares that gays must embrace lifelong celibacy; yet, in so doing, they frustrate God's declaration that "it is not good for a man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

This double failure on the part of the "anti-gay gospel" is "deeply wounding and destructive." The unspoken complaint here is that following the gospel of life should lead to peace, joy, and understanding; hence, quite clearly the "anti-gay gospel" is not the gospel of life even though Matthew's church declares that it is the one and only Gospel.

===== Endnotes for Case 2 =====

<sup>[1]</sup> Notice that this evangelical statement regards all immoral sex as "lust." Ratzinger would prefer to say "self-indulgent passions" rather than "lust." Why so? Because Ratzinger believes that the homosexual inclination is not chosen and, as such, is not to be considered in itself as "sinful." Moreover, he allows that while all homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered," the

degree of guilt changes with the circumstances. This is a much more nuanced position. Here is the critical text: □

It has been argued that the homosexual orientation in certain cases is not the result of deliberate choice; and so the homosexual person would then have no choice but to behave in a homosexual fashion. Lacking freedom, such a person, even if engaged in homosexual activity, would not be culpable.

Here, the Church's wise moral tradition is necessary since it warns against generalizations in judging individual cases. In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance; or other circumstances may increase it. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behavior of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable (**The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons**, §11).

[2]↪ Reparative Therapy (also known as Conversion Therapy) claims that adolescent homosexuality may arise from traumatic events in the past and that, with careful psychological counseling, part or all of the same-sex attraction can be dispelled. For a strong and persuasive advocate, see Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D., "*What Is Reparative Therapy? Examining the Controversy*" (<http://www.josephnicolosi.com/what-is-reparative-therapy-exa/>). Please be aware, however, that this form of therapy has been widely shown to be non-productive and even harmful to the degree that even the *American Psychiatric Association* warns against crediting its claims. See "*The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity*" (<http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>).

[3]↪ Matthew Vines writes in his book as follows:

As a lawyer, my dad weighed the evidence for the possibility of orientation change. Pointing to Matt. 19:26, he reminded me that all things are possible with God. Yet after reading a fair amount about "ex-gay" ministries, he realized that none of the evidence seemed to show God was changing gay people's sexual orientation (**God and the Gay Christian**, p. 10).

A controversial Christian ministry devoted to changing people “affected by homosexuality” announced in April of 2014 that it was shutting its doors after operating for more than three decades. The announcement by *Exodus International* came during its religious conference in Irvine and after its President Alan Chambers apologized to members of the gay community for “years of undue judgment by the organization and the Christian Church as a whole.”

(<http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/04/22/god-gays-conversation-albert-mohler-matthew-vines/#sthash.ji8Nb8dn.dpuf>).

In October of 2011, John Smid, the former director of *Love in Action*, the country’s oldest and largest ex-gay ministry, acknowledged on his blog that, contrary to the claims of the movement he represented for decades, gay people cannot become straight. “I’ve never met a man who experienced a change from homosexual to heterosexual,” he wrote. He himself certainly has not. Evangelicals used to insist that “change is possible,” says Warren Throckmorton, a Grove City College psychology professor once associated with the ex-gay movement. “The new paradigm, I believe, is no, it doesn’t look like that works, and so you go with it, you accept it, and you try to make the best life you can in congruence with the rest of your beliefs,” he says

(<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/10/13/ex-gay-leader-john-smid-s-about-face.html>).

[4]↵ Matthew Vines, “The Reformation Project: Training Christians to Eradicate Homophobia from the Church,” *The Huffpost Gay Voices*, 05 March 2013

([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/the-reformation-project-christians-homophobia\\_b\\_2790039.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/the-reformation-project-christians-homophobia_b_2790039.html)).

[5]↵ For excellent life-stories inspired by the Reformation Project of Matthew Vines, go to <https://twitter.com/ReformationP/>

[6]↵ Matthew Vines, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Why I Left College and Spent Two Years Finding Out What the Scriptures *Really* Say,” *The Huffpost Gay Voices*, 26 March 2012

([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/bible-homosexuality\\_b\\_1378368.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/bible-homosexuality_b_1378368.html)).

[7]↵ Given my own special interest in Jewish-Christian relations, I am especially sensitive to how anti-Jewish sentiments circulating among Catholics were used to interpret a few texts in the Gospels (especially, “his blood be upon us and upon our children” Matt. 27:25) in order to prove (a) that God held all Jews accountable for the killing of Jesus and (b) that God, as a result of this crime, had rejected all Jews in all times and in all places as his chosen people, and, in their place, God embraced Catholics with his love and protection and enduring covenant. In the wake of this “anti-Jewish gospel,” Christians routinely interpreted natural and deliberate disasters (beginning with the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 68-70 CE) as the divine retribution inflicted upon Jews for their crime of killing Jesus, the Son of God.

Not until after the Holocaust did the Christian churches finally come to their senses and begin to sort out what the Scriptures did and did not say about the Jews. As a result, biblical interpretations held for more than sixteen hundred years were uprooted during the course of a few decades (1948-1968). Meanwhile, biblical interpretations that had been ignored or obscured were brought forward, more especially, (a) that God's election of the Jewish people was permanent and irrevocable and (b) that Jesus himself lived and died as a faithful Jew. □

This case of anti-Jewish prejudice poisoning the true meaning of the Scriptures is important for a number of reasons. First, it demonstrates that, once an error inserts itself, it can persist from generation to generation undetected because the false interpretation itself feeds upon the anti-Jewish prejudice that stimulated its origination. Secondly, it demonstrates that, saints and sinners, bishops and scholars all were mutually supportive in maintaining and promoting these false biblical interpretations. Only the massive and unthinkable Holocaust had enough shock value to inspire a critical reassessment of those anti-Jewish interpretations that had become firmly entrenched within the Catholic tradition. For further details, see James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001) & Aaron Milavec, *Salvation Is from the Jews: Reflections on Saving Grace within Judaism and on Messianic Hope within Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007).

[8]↵ Keep in mind that complementary personalities and complementary skill-sets figure into the mutual choice of a suitable partner in both heterosexual and homosexual unions.

[9]↵ Matthew Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality,” 08 Mar 2012 (www.matthewvines.com/transcript/).

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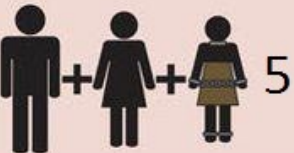
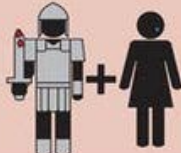
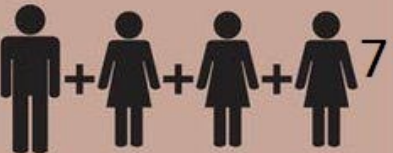

### **Case 3: Does the Bible support the contention that marriage rules never change?**

Many Christians imagine that biblical inspiration takes hold when God overrides the human faculties of an author such that they write what God wants them to write—nothing more and nothing less. With this understanding, Christians had good reason to imagine that the Bible had a coherent unity and that a single author, the Lord God, expresses himself on every page. Hence, whether you begin with Genesis or with the Book of Revelations, there is unity of thought and unity of purpose from beginning to end.

Today educated Christians recognize that the books of the Bible were composed at different times by different authors and that there is no overall unity of thought and expression in the Bible. Even the linguistic differences demonstrate that various books were written by different persons. Mark’s Gospel, for instance, reveals a limited vocabulary and a rough master of Greek grammar. In contrast, Luke’s Gospel has a polished Greek appropriate to someone who was a master wordsmith.

When it comes to marriage, it is no secret that the divine norms governing marriage (as summarized in the chart below) changed during the twelve hundred years that span the books of the Bible.

# MARRIAGE =

<p><b>MAN + WOMAN (NUCLEAR FAMILY)</b> Genesis 2:24</p> <p>-wives subordinate to their husbands -interfaith marriages forbidden -marriages generally arranged, not based on romantic love -bride who could not prove her virginity was stoned to death</p>  <p>1</p>	<p><b>MAN + BROTHER'S WIDOW (LEVIRATE MARRIAGE)</b> Genesis 38:6-10</p> <p>-widow who had not borne a son required to marry her brother in law -must submit sexually to her new husband</p>  <p>2</p>
<p><b>MAN + WIVES + CONCUBINES</b></p> <p>Abraham (2 concubines), Gideon (1), Nahor (1), Jacob (1), Eliphaz (1), Gideon (2), Caleb (2), Manassah (1), Solomon (300), Belshazzar (&gt; 1)</p>  <p>3</p>	<p><b>RAPIST + HIS VICTIM</b> Deuteronomy 22:28-29</p> <p>-virgin who is raped must marry her rapist -rapist must pay victim's father 50 shekels of silver for property loss</p>  <p>4</p>
<p><b>MAN + WOMAN + WOMAN'S PROPERTY</b> Genesis 16</p> <p>-man could acquire his wife's property including her slaves</p>  <p>5</p>	<p><b>MALE SOLDIER + PRISONER OF WAR</b> Numbers 31:1-18, Deuteronomy 21:11-14</p> <p>-under Moses' command, Israelites kill every Midianite man, woman and child; save for the virgin girls who are taken as spoils of war -wives must submit sexually to their new owners</p>  <p>6</p>
<p><b>MAN + WOMAN + WOMAN + WOMAN... (POLYGAMY)</b></p> <p>Lamech (2 wives), Esau (3), Jacob (2), Ashur (2), Gideon (many), Elkanah (2), David (many), Solomon (700), Rehoboam (3), Abijah (14), Jehoram, Joash, Ahab, Jeholachin, Belshazzar</p>  <p>7</p>	<p><b>MALE SLAVE + FEMALE SLAVE</b> Exodus 21:4</p> <p>-slave owner could assign female slaves to his male slaves -female slaves must submit sexually to their new husbands</p>  <p>8</p>

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oving further, it would be absurd to suggest that once the canon of the NT was fixed that nothing more needed to be decided upon or legislated. The writings of the Church Fathers and the decrees of local Synods and Ecumenical Councils expanded upon the NT norms precisely because they were aware that the NT had no exhaustive and systematic norms for sexuality. Hence, the bishops had to sort out the inconsistencies of the Bible and to respond to new questions and new situations of life that were never addressed in the Bible or that were addressed but only partially and inadequately.



Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote a brilliant treatise in 1845 entitled, “An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine.” Newman's great masterpiece was the last work he completed before coming into communion with Rome. It is a magisterial defense of the idea that the Church's comprehension of divine revelation enlarges and expands as it encounters different cultures and new social situations. He argues quite brilliantly (using a multitude of case studies) to reinforce the notion that the Bible cannot interpret itself and that, when every Christian is left to their own private interpretation, there cannot

be any unity of understanding or of practice. In the end, he comes to this conclusion: “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often” ((Chapter 1, Section 1, Part 7)). [Click here to explore](#) how Newman’s thesis was embraced by the Fathers of Vatican II.

Some Catholics are distressed to find out that there are inconsistencies in the revealed laws of God in the Bible and further inconsistencies in the marriage legislation of Church Synods. In many ways this is so because their priests and religious teachers are fond to glamorize the Church hierarchy by insisting that there is in the Catholic Church a chain of transmission whereby the one true faith that Jesus taught to his apostles has been passed on through an unbroken line of Catholic bishops down to the present time. This enforces the notion that the faith passed on is “always the same” (*semper eadem*). Anyone who has studied church history or the development of doctrine knows that “faith” was passed on but the expression of that faith is quite another thing. In point of fact, [marriage laws changed at different times and in different places along with everything else](#). Others, like Cardinal Newman, are quite aware that if God just kept repeating himself by issuing identical instructions on marriage over a period of twelve

hundred years, this would create the distinct impression that God is indifferent to or ignorant of human experience and cultural changes.



Any human father who rules his children with an iron fist and imposes upon them rules and practices that are harsh and outmoded, would be deemed as an abusive and incompetent parent. “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” “Children are to be seen and not heard.” “Never praise your child; it only makes them proud.” “Father knows best.” One of my boyfriends in grade school

told me of how his father would strip him naked, hang him by his wrists in the basement, and whip him with a leather belt. Needless to say, I saw this as extreme. If I had known of the discipline advised by God in Deut 21:18-21, I would have thought that God himself was an inept parent. Here is the key text:

<sup>18</sup> If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, <sup>19</sup> his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. <sup>20</sup> They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” <sup>21</sup> Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid [NIV].

Our analysis of Gen 2 above illustrated how God is no stranger to human interaction and that he adapts his initiative to fit the situation. The same thing must be said regarding the writings of the Church Fathers and the decrees of Church Synods. If all the bishops and synods issued identical instructions on marriage over a period of twenty hundred years, this would create the impression that the bishops were either out-of-touch or completely indifferent to human experience. Again, as Newman came to understand, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” That being the case, let’s go on to examine a case study that will illustrate Newman’s thesis.



#### Case 4: The Emergence and Disappearance of Levirate Marriages

In many societies, both ancient and modern, levirate marriage was practiced.

Among the Hebrews, a levirate marriage is literally a “marriage with a brother-in-law.” The word *levirate*, which has nothing to do with the tribe of Levi, comes from the Latin word *levir*, “a husband’s brother.” In ancient times, if a man died without a child, it was common for the man’s unmarried brother to marry the widow in order to provide an heir for the deceased. A widow would marry a brother-in-law, and the first son produced in that union was considered the legal descendant of her dead husband.

We see a couple of examples in the Bible of levirate marriage. The first is the story of Tamar and Onan in [Genesis 38](#). Tamar had been married to Er, a son of Judah. Er died, leaving Tamar childless ([Genesis 38:6–7](#)). Judah’s solution was to follow the standard procedure of levirate marriage: he told Er’s brother Onan, “Sleep with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother” (28:8).

Onan was more than willing to sleep with Tamar, but, unfortunately, he had no desire to have a child with her: “Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother” (28:9). In other words, Onan was taking selfish advantage of levirate marriage. He wanted sex with his sister-in-law, but he purposefully avoided impregnating her. Onan was aware that, if Tamar became pregnant, her child would claim a portion in the family inheritance. Thus, the inheritance coming to Onan would be diluted. God intervened on behalf of Tamar. God called Onan’s actions “wicked” and killed him (28:10).



Then, Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up" for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers (28:11). So Tamar agreed to wait. When Shelah was grown, Judah failed to keep his promise. Years went by. Then Tamar decided to take a bold step outside the Law. She disguised herself as a "temple prostitute" and used this ruse to get the offspring that is her

right from the father of Shelah. Three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned [to death]" (38:24). Tamar then confessed to her ruse.



Hearing her story, Judah responded, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah" (38:26). Thus she is exonerated by her father-in-law who confesses that he blocked her from access to his eligible sons.

This narrative is revealing. It demonstrates that there are circumstances whereby a widow can, in desperation, seduce her father-in-law. It also demonstrates that Levirate marriage was practiced long before it was included in the Deuteronomic Code. Thus, even God adjusts his Divine Law to take into account those circumstances when "incest" is [not only permitted, it is required](#).

Some seven hundred years later, the book of Deuteronomy was found in the temple (2 Kings 22–23). The purpose of this book was to consolidate the temple in Jerusalem as the exclusive place to worship the Lord God and to insure that the direction of the temple was entirely in the hands of the Aronide priests. At this time, it appears that the books of Moses were lost. Thus the book of Deuteronomy with its description of the laws given to Moses is presumably the sole witness to God's revelation on Mt. Sinai. The discovery of this book may have given rise to the Deuteronomic Reform or, quite possible, the book itself might have been created by the reformers. For details, [click here](#).

There are many significant changes in Deuteronomy. For example, the law reveals a special concern for the poor, for widows and the fatherless. All Israelites are brothers and sisters, and each will answer to God for his treatment of "his neighbor." Now, for the first time, God calls his people to take care that the stranger who lives among you is treated fairly. The stranger is often mentioned in tandem with the concern for the widow and the orphan. Furthermore, there is a specific commandment to love the stranger. These things, of course, are some of the themes that

distinguished Jesus' teaching. The Deuteronomic Reform, therefore, envisions a leap forward into the kind of Judaism that finds full development in the Acts of the Apostles.

Our special concern is changes in marriage law. It would appear that the death of a brother in an extended household would often result in his widow being neglected or even expelled from the family. This occasioned great suffering for the widow. The introduction of Levirate marriages was thus an act of compassion (some would say an act of justice) toward the widow. Once a widow had a son, her place in the family was secured and she had access to a portion of the family inheritance.

God's purpose for levirate marriage is clearly stated: "The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel" (Deut 25:6). An unmarried brother of the deceased man bore a responsibility to marry his sister-in-law: God called it "the duty of a brother-in-law" ([Deut 25:5](#)). This is clearly an "exception" to the previous divine command that God delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife: it *is* your brother's nakedness" (Lev 18:16).

Notice that levirate marriage was a marital bond not born out of free choice and of growing affection but out of duty. Deut 25:7-10 hints how this new ruling was oftentimes resisted by the brother-in-law. The law then describes the measured steps to be taken whereby this resistance was to be overcome:

7 However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." 8 Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," 9 his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." 10 That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.

The social pressure on the brother-in-law was enormous. The village elders were intent upon providing for the widow from the resources of the family into which she married in the first place. If that family failed to care for her out of obligation and if the widow's parents were unwilling to allow her to return home, then the community would be burdened by another charity case. Hence the husband's brother had to be constrained to marry as an obligation to the deceased and as an economic and social safety net for the widow. The public shaming involved in allowing the widow [to remove his sandal and to spit in his face](#) is also unprecedented because it gives a powerless woman the right to shame a powerful man due to his stubbornness and his unwillingness to make provisions for his brother's widow.

## **Conclusion**

Notice that levirate marriage presumes that polygamy is socially acceptable and divinely authorized. For this reason, Jews everywhere have long ago abandoned levirate marriage, and even [the most devout Jews in the Hassidic quarters of Jerusalem are not anxious for its return](#)—despite the fact that Deut 25:5 makes it clear that levirate marriage is God's will. In Mishnah and in Talmud we learn [how the discussions of the rabbis sought to remove the necessity of Levirate marriage and to provide alternatives](#).

At the risk of overlooking exceptions, I would hazard the following general conclusions:

#1 No religious community can expect to be alive and to continue to thrive if it mindlessly imposes upon its participants a rigid conformity to practices that were understood as divinely authorized in the past but, more often than not, cause resentment and unnecessary suffering in the present. Test cases: the religious anti-slavery movement and the recent [redefining the fate of those children who die without baptism](#).

#2 The Bible and the study of church history allow us to see a huge landscape whereupon religious communities, sometimes slowly, sometimes abruptly, change their minds in order to keep pace with the living voice of God. Test case: Peter describes his own conversion saying, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to

associate with you [Gentiles]. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean” (Act 10:28).

#3 Prophets and teachers serve to keep alive the quest for holiness in changing cultural and historical conditions. Tradition is always a guide, but some elements in any tradition invariably become an obstacle and present a disservice to the living God. Not to be willing to change is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit because it venerates the demands of the past so completely as to be incapable of heeding the voice of the living God. "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 4:7).

Test case: Current discussions on whether polygamy (as a matter of justice) needs to be allowed in the case of those African converts to Christianity where polygamy has been an abiding part of their social fabric ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy\\_in\\_Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy_in_Christianity) & <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1981/02/of-sex-and-the-catholic-church/305451/>).

Test case: Despite the fact that homosexual acts were traditionally harshly punished within both civil and church societies, the majorities of citizens in the USA, Ireland, and Australia have recently seen fit to sanction and protect same-sex marriages. Christians now are sorely divided on this issue.

#1 Some Christians believe that God in the bible only sanctions marriage between one man and one woman. On the basis of the study done above, we can now agree that this is a misreading of the evidence of the bible. When the bible is rightfully examined, it reveals that God has mandated at least eight different forms of marriage at one time or another (Remember the chart above). Christians today can continue to affirm that God only sanctions marriage between one man and one woman; however, this belief can no longer be founded exclusively (a) on biblical texts such as Gen 2 and (b) on the presumption that the divine laws governing marriage within the bible never change.

#2 Some Christians believe that their church laws regarding marriage have never changed. On the basis of the study done above, we can now agree that this is a misreading of the evidence of

their denominational church history. When their history is carefully examined, it will reveal that their church laws have periodically changed in order to update their service to the living God.

#3 Consider how, in times past, marriages that crossed denominational lines were outlawed, then tolerated under certain special circumstances, and then finally approved with joy. Consider also, how prejudices against former slaves or against "primitive" races prompted churches to legislate against inter-racial marriages. Consider, also, how such legislation was eventually changed to tolerate such inter-racial marriages in certain circumstances. Then, consider how your church's legislation gradually moved toward a full and joyful acceptance of inter-racial marriages. Examine if and when something akin to levirate marriage or polygamy were practiced within your denominational history.

#4 Consider to what extent the legislation in your denomination was influenced by civil legislation on the criminality of homosexual acts and by the psychological analysis of homosexuality as a "mental disorder." In the last thirty years, consider how members of your Christian denomination have come to personally experience [in their families](#), [in their parishes](#), and [in their Netflix choices](#) instances wherein same-sex unions manifest something of the self-sacrificing love and the permanence of affection traditionally associated with God's covenant with his people as enshrined in the theology of marriage.

#5 No matter where you stand on this issue today, [consider what responsibility you and your denomination have to reexamine the unnecessary suffering and combative factionalism imposed by things as they now stand](#). What responsibility do you and your denomination have to restore "peace, justice, and love" as the balm for healing your present denominational divisions so as to make "living faith" a possibility for future generations?

Please share your feedback here = <http://www.jesus4lesbians.com/?p=501> Your experiences are significant to me and enable me to improve this workshop.

I warmly thank you.

Aaron Milavec (author)