

***The Bible's YES to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart* by Mark Achtemeier (WJK, 2014), 137 pp; *A Letter to My Congregation* by Ken Wilson (Read the Spirit, 2014), 196 pp; "Five Questions For Christians Who Believe the Bible Supports Gay Marriage" by Kevin DeYoung, The Gospel Coalition, 2014.**

We've always been a pilgrim people, as Reformed theologian Peter Leithart knows: "At each juncture, God calls his people to shed old ways and old names, to die to old routines and ways of life, including ways of life God himself has established. We do not like this. We do not want our world shattered, even if God rebuilds from the rubble." Achtemeier and Wilson are fit for such a pilgrimage.

Dedicating his book "to my dear wife", Achtemeier affirms a partnered life for gays. This contrasts with another Presbyterian's dedicating his *antigay* book to his wife, as if he'd never heard of Jesus' New Commandment. Laying down one's *prejudice* for others ought to be a snap to laying down one's *life*.

Whatever else Wilson and Achtemeier marshal in revising their earlier notions – and they engage Bible verses they'd read differently – their impetus is to do justice, love mercy and submit to Jesus' summation of the Law and Prophets.

As a Vineyard pastor, Wilson runs political risks that Achtemeier, in the PCUSA, doesn't. While discernment was leading him to new insights, fellow Vineyard pastors gave warnings. Yet he and his wife were meeting gay couples that didn't match what the Bible supposedly says about them. Besides, as he reminds us, marriage is part of *this passing age* and he suggests a *theological* "downgrade to the status of marriage". In Romans 14 and 15, he gets guidance for disputes between Christians.

Achtemeier says he was "an antigay church activist [before he saw] that the biblical case in support of gay marriage is overwhelming". He now sees that biblical guidance on sex is "designed to foster and protect a person's ability to make an all-encompassing gift of self to a beloved partner in Christ-like love and mutuality." And he finds "striking precedent" for his work in Calvin's work on biblical prohibitions of usury. Calvin "discovered that the prohibitions were directed against loans that served to add to the burden of poor people and increase their desperation." Since Bible verses now used against gays "were directed toward idolatrous, violent, and exploitative same-gender behaviors", he follows Calvin who "realized that his own day and time had yielded the possibility of a new type of lending ... that the biblical writers had not anticipated [so] he moved beyond the fragment passages to the broader witness of Scripture about justice and fairness."

DeYoung, a Reformed pastor in The Gospel Coalition, is married but he opposes such bliss for gay couples. Where, here, is the *sympathy* that F. W. Boreham saw *everywhere* in Scripture? Ancients knew *nothing* of same-sex *orientation* or same-sex *marriage*. Now we do. Yet, when it comes to gay couples' basic needs, many Christians find *selfishness* easier than *sympathy*. In another blog, DeYoung mocks "romantic love" as a reason for gay marriage, though one assumes it's a reason for his own marriage.

Firing loaded questions at gay marriage supporters, he begins in *reductio ad absurdum*: dads will marry their sons, sisters will marry their brothers and groups will wed en masse. His scare scenarios are leftover stones once cast at *mixed race* marriage by other proof-texting Christians. Reinterpretation of those verses came too late to save the victims. Meanwhile, DeYoung ignores the Bible's levirate marriages, polygamy and child brides.

He posits "normative significance" to "*male and female*" in Genesis 1 but fails to note Paul's referencing that same "male and female" (Gal 3:28) as being of *no theological significance in Christ*. And his straw man ignores gay couples' *seeking* marriage for reasons appreciated by Calvin after centuries of church law forbidding marriage to clergy. Following Paul, Calvin saw marriage as "necessary for those who have not the gift of continence [and it] ought not to be forbidden to any [as] the remedy provided against fornication". And the chaos of a *mixed-orientation* marriage is no solution for the couple or the kids.

DeYoung asks if Christian supporters really expect a "biblical" ethic in *gay* marriages. Does *he* expect a "biblical" ethic in *heterosexual* marriages as such? Unfortunately, some "progressive" gay leaders do push polyandry and other PC poppycock, but plenty of gay couples reject such stupidity. And with family, cultural, legal and congregational support, can't *some* same-sex couples live as ethically as *some* heterosexual couples?

He thinks moms and dads aren't interchangeable. *Which* moms, *which* dads? Each can contribute *differently*, but gender doesn't make a *good* parent. Love and wisdom do. Besides, for gay parents' kids, *both* genders *are present* in members of the wider family.

His tired tirade against anal sex misses all the *hetero-anal* sex, e.g., on pottery from as far back as 1,700 years ago and from as far-flung locales as ancient Greece, Asia and South America. Evidently, he doesn't know that a third of gay men do *not* engage in anal sex but nearly half of straight men *do*. The *Journal of Sexual Medicine* finds that gay couples' *most common* sex acts are romantic holding, kissing, mutual masturbation and genital-to-genital rubbing. Moreover, his reducing *marriage* to *any* particular *sex act* is bizarre. Surely *his* marriage means more to him and his wife than *any* specific *sex act*.

His parting shot: "How have all Christians at all times and in all places interpreted the Bible so wrongly for so long?" This assumes that "all Christians at all times and in all places" *dealt* with *today's data on homosexuality*. And how did scribes, Pharisees, Saul of Tarsus, Christian slaveholders, et al., get so many things so wrong for so long? Straining out gnats and swallowing camels is natural to the self-righteousness in all of us. And what's so new about disagreeing Christians: Puritans, Dissenters, Non-conformists, Reformers? *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, isn't it? In disputes in Acts, Paul's letters, battles over the Bible and slavery, science, segregation, speaking in tongues and controversies that prompted Christians to torture, hang, behead and burn each other at stakes, *we have church history*. Then there's *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives & Women Preachers* and – oh yeah, that *other* "Reformed" church down the street! And all along, we've had to change our minds on earlier "biblical" interpretations – *even with tears*.

