

“Old Testament Law and the Charge of Inconsistency” by Tim Keller. *Redeemer Report*, June 2012.

When we’re said to “pick and choose” Bible verses, it can be frustrating. Keller says: “I vainly hope that one day someone will access their common sense (or at least talk to an informed theological advisor) before leveling the charge of inconsistency.” Well, we all do have canons within the canon. Some are substantial; some, but spins on pet peeves.

Keller’s helpful perspective: “Once you grant the main premise of the Bible – about the surpassing significance of Christ and his salvation – then all the various parts of the Bible make sense [and if you don’t,] the Bible is at best a mish-mash.” But, on *gay* issues, is he sufficiently focused on “the surpassing significance of Christ” or stuck in a culture war?

In a world of over 33,000 dissenting Christian denominations, *some* are evangelical. But, as Mark Noll notes: “Once past a shared commitment to a supernatural gospel, evangelicals are all over the place theologically. ... Christianity does not possess a single, sharply defined *cultural* essence. Rather, it appears in different forms (sometimes, very different forms) in different centuries, in different places. You will find resources in Christianity for you and your specific cultural situation that those from far away never dreamed possible.” “No single evangelical tradition exists.” (Al Mohler and D. G. Hart)

“God’s self-revelation is an unfolding process that is both organic and progressive.” (Henry Krabbendam) Augustine wrote 14 books of retractions and church historian Paul Woolley resisted writing books, fearing he’d later disagree with himself. “It is natural, and to be expected that [interpretations] will be revised over and over again by each generation.” (Alistair McGrath) So, the Reformed affirm: “Reformed and ever reforming”. Calvinists no longer burn heretics and Baptists still flip-flop on Calvinism. Dispensationalism came along in the 1800s. Southern Baptists cheered *Roe v Wade* before going pro-life. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church ordains women but Keller’s Presbyterian Church in America doesn’t. Most churches joining the PCA in 1973 were once segregated; now they do interracial weddings. Reared a racist Christian, John Piper, at 50, adopted a black baby. Today, a black man leads the Southern Baptist Convention, founded in 1845 to support the “biblical” right of whites to own black slaves.

Now, by anachronism and exaggeration, Keller reads “plenty [on] homosexuality” into the Bible – even into Jesus’ words on divorce and a time when a gay couple was beside the point. Who now returns to a pre-Fall world? F. F. Bruce: For Paul, “male and [kai] female” (Gen 1:27) has no relevance in *Christ*. (Gal 3:28) Bruce warns: “It is not enough to say ‘the Bible says’ without at the same time considering to whom the Bible says it, and in what circumstances.” The Bible wasn’t written in *our* language or in *our* culture. Both *words and culture* must be translated. No biblical writer or original reader knew of *psychosexual orientation* or *same-sex peer romance*. So, “we must be very careful not to read into the text present-day concerns that are not really there. Numerous interpretations have been proved wrong by recent advances. ... The more we know, the more conscious we are of our ignorance. Two hundred years ago, Bible readers only thought that they understood many passages that now we have doubts about. ... No doubt there are cases when a scholar hits on an idea whose time has not come, and the fact that the church is not immediately convinced of its validity is no reason to abandon it.” (Moises Silva)

In Romans 1, Paul may mean pederasty, slave abuse or avaricious anal penetration of women to avoid pregnancy (the inference of church fathers for 400 years). Writing from Corinth, where over a thousand self-castrated priests served Kybele in orgiastic rites, Paul no doubt has cultic prostitution in mind. (Leon Morris) Bruce sees here the “idolatry and fornication of Baal-peor” and a “humiliating arrogance to those who are not powerful enough to retaliate.” But *whatever* Paul’s *examples* of corruption, they’re not the *cause* of God’s relinquishing pagans to idols; they’re the *results* of *pagan rejection* of God. “The moral degradation of the heathen was a punishment of their apostasy from God.” (Charles Hodge) Failure to follow Paul’s clear *sequence* here is pastorally tragic today.

Even kids who’ve given their hearts to Jesus sense a growing same-sex attraction and are devastated. Who thinks they’ve so *deliberately suppressed* God’s truth that unsought same-sex attractions are the *consequences*? What *they* suppress are *same-sex attractions!* Instead of turning *from* God, they go *to* God: “Please, Lord, make me straight.” And, He doesn’t! Then, happily married preachers tell *them* that *they* must live *alone* or get into a *mixed-orientation* marriage. How do such insensitive demands demonstrate *loving these as one loves self* or obeying *Christ’s law* by bearing *their* burdens? (Gal 5:14; 6:2)

Paul’s “against nature” now gets tied to all things *gay*. Yet, he says *circumcision* is against nature (Jews weren’t *born* circumcised) as is God’s *grafting* pagans into Israel’s cultivated olive (Gentiles weren’t *born* Jews). He calls *idolatry* against nature. We’re not *born* idolatrous; we *turn* to idols – whether idols of stone or selfish, stony systems.

Paul berated Christians who *sue* each other. (I Cor 6:9) Christians still sue each other – often over property rights in gay disputes, while using this verse to bash gays. *Whatever* he meant by a now *indecipherable* term for abusers he saw as *just as evil* as the litigious, Greek speaking church fathers took them as *economic*, not *sexual*, sins *between men and women*. Says Silva: “Some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms.”

Noll: Pro-slavery preachers used *explicit* Bible verses but abolitionists had to rely on *general* biblical calls to *love* – “chapter-and-verse [over against abolitionists’] larger gestalt of scriptural sentiment. [Those who] defended the legitimacy of slavery in the Bible had the easiest task.” And blacks were said to be *loved* while enslaved, forbidden to marry and barred from white churches because of what “the Bible said” *then*. Keller’s said – and *means* it: “There’s not going to be disdain of homosexuals at my church.” But biblical and scientific data call for revising assumptions that, *in effect*, do indeed, disdain.

Harvie Conn: “A gospel that does not address people as the sinned-against poses a lot of problems for the sinned-against.” The polls confirm this. Yet, “the weight of the New Testament ... shifts to the principle of flexibility, especially the flexibility of not giving needless offense to a large portion of the culture to whom we are supposed to witness. Hence the Bible’s own principles invite adjustment to cultural circumstances on matters that do not threaten the heart of the gospel.” (George Marsden)