

*Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christian Debate by Justin Lee (Jericho Books, 2012) 259 pp.*

Since lesbian and gay youth are ridiculed, caricatured, guilt-tripped, kicked out of families, churches and Christian schools, it's not inexplicable that they'd try to steer clear of their abusers – including the religious ringleaders of that abuse. The abuse is fueled by Bible verses that are abused by the ignorant and the self-righteous. So, some of the abused seek safety in vague “spirituality” or in the seeming “open-mindedness” of liberal religion. Hurt, frustrated, angry and cynical, others fall into the ever-increasing category of the “Nones”. But, thankfully, some are finding a home in the Gay Christian Network where they can pursue, with other serious Christians, either a life of committed celibacy or life in a committed monogamous partnership with another Christian who happens to be gay or lesbian. Justin Lee started GCN in the wake of his own struggle for a coherently faithful integration of his same-sex orientation and Christian discipleship.

Asbury Seminary's Ben Witherington notes that, “The church is paying a high price for its ignorance these days.” That's true. But in homosexual controversies, the church is passing the high cost of its ignorance on to its gay and lesbian children.

Growing up in a Southern Baptist home and church, Lee was seen as a serious and committed Christian teen. Other kids teasingly called him “God Boy”. He recalls: “More than anything in the world, I wanted to represent my God well, and I prayed every day for the wisdom and opportunities to do so.” But what no one around him could see was that he was beginning to be torn by what he found inside – both his willingly loving heart for Jesus and un-asked-for same-sex attraction that he heard preachers angrily denounce as totally contrary to a loving heart for Jesus. That disdain is, as Lee observes poignantly, “not just about sexual behavior, but about gay people”. Always generous, he posits that pastors surely don't intend to hurt anyone by such preaching, but, predictably, its effects are devastating. And with all the increasingly available data on the culture in biblical times and today's psychosexual research, preachers have ever fewer excuses for the damage they do in this regard. They ignore the venerable adage, “First, do no harm”.

Lee walks his readers through the lonely, halting and even terrifying climb that he made to get through his denial, resistance, fears and futile “ex-gay” efforts to an eventual integration of his trust in his Savior and an acceptance of his given sexual orientation.

Looking into the notions of what causes same-sex attraction, he sums up: “We Don't Know!”. And, we don't! This really hasn't changed since the mid-1960s when, in my doctoral review on etiology, I concluded: “Nobody knows what causes homosexuality”. The editor of *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* called my analysis, “the best in existence.” And, at any rate, at least in males, by the time one is aware of his same-sex orientation it's immutable and hunches about “cause” are beside the point. Relevant questions, then, are these: What is one to do with that same-sex orientation and what is one to make of another's? As the wise Christian mother of a gay son learned in her own journey and in her ministry to other mothers of gay children: “Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved.” (Barbara Johnson)

Until recently – the knee-jerk reaction of Christians was to push so-called “ex-gay” promises. Nowadays, the evidence that these

efforts don't change anyone's orientation can't any longer be ignored. But “reparative” advocates refuse to back down. In his own struggle, Lee sought their help. He tells of his experience down that “rabbit hole” of misleading promises, misrepresented results, deliberate doubletalk and cover-up. Lee is now clear: “Christians need to be aware [of what they're endorsing]. Sadly, the warning signs date back to the very beginning of the ex-gay movement.” He reports some of the sordid history of that ill-conceived enterprise.

While contemplating a life of celibacy, Lee prayed earnestly: “Dear God, I don't want to be celibate. I don't want to be alone. I want to fall in love with someone and spend my life with that person. But even more than that, I want to serve You. And if Your will is for me to be celibate my entire life, I will do it. Please show me what You want for my life, and help me to do Your will, whatever it is.” He says he “prayed and prayed that night. And God heard me.” He “felt a wave of peace rush over me. For the first time since beginning my journey, I knew things were going to be okay. ... I was committed to endure whatever God called me to. And God was going to be with me.” He adds: “The church, however, was another matter.”

In his “Back to the Bible” chapter, he grapples with hermeneutics and conflicting theological opinions, saying he was left “even more confused.” Still, “I was torn”, for so many Bible verses are far clearer (e.g., on slavery, women's head-coverings, debt, etc.) than are the few alleged to address same-sex partnership today. Yet, no one these days interprets these clearer verses literally. They're explained away as cultural artifacts. So, he kept searching the Scriptures, seeking God's will about all he was up against.

Then, he found Romans 13:8-10 and had to re-read it many times for, at first, it seemed too “hippy liberal” for him. Paul states: “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Citing some of the Ten Commandments, Paul says that these and “whatever other commandments there may be” are all summed up in “love your neighbor as yourself.” He's echoing Jesus' telling religious leaders: “All the Law and the Prophets hang on the commandments to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbors as yourself.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Here, Lee sees “the biggest thing the church was missing” – agapic love fulfills all law! “Grace. We had missed the point of grace.” Thus, in seriously biblical terms, Lee achieves his book's subtitled goal, resolving today's gay debate! Said Jesus: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them loves me and is loved by my Father. I, too, will love him and show myself to him.” (John 14:21) Jesus did, does and will show himself to such! After all, even the commands are conceived and carried out in and by God's love!