

For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8

RECORD

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2015 marks the 40th anniversary of Evangelicals Concerned. Ralph Blair founded EC in 1975 and published notice in *The Advocate*, the national gay paper. In talking with his friend, Bob Rayburn, founding president of Covenant College and Seminary, Rayburn suggested that EC be *formally* launched during the next convention of the National Association of Evangelicals. And it was. 2015 marks the centennial of Rayburn's birth.

For four decades, other evangelicals, too, have encouraged EC. Among them: biblical scholars, theologians, clinicians, behavioral scientists and other professors at Anderson, Asbury, Beeson, Calvin, Eastern Baptist, Fuller, Gordon, Hope, Houghton, the Institute for Christian Studies, Messiah, Pepperdine, Samford, Trinity (Deerfield), Western (RCA), Westmont and other schools. They've included an Evangelical Theological Society president, chair of Old Testament translation for the NIV and other translators, the founder of the *Reformed Journal*, the founder of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, best-selling authors Rosalind Rinker, Eugenia Price, Charlie Shedd, Kay Lindskoog and other writers whose works are published by Baker, Eerdmans, IVP, NavPress, Revell, Tyndale, Word and Zondervan; national leaders in Campus Crusade, IVCF, Young Life, Youth for Christ, the American Scientific Affiliation and the Christian Association for Psychological Studies. Cynthia Clawson, Ken Medema, Tom Key and other Christian artists have performed at EC conferences and we've heard keynotes from several of the *former* leaders of the defunct "ex-gay" movement.

We've had some 2,000 weekly EC Bible studies in Manhattan alone, annual winter Bible study weekends in the Pennsylvania mountains and autumn preaching festivals at Ocean Grove. In 2015 we'll sponsor the 73rd of EC's regional summer connECTION retreats and our guest speakers will be

James V. Brownson of Western Seminary and Carol Ann Vaughn Cross of Samford University. We'll be publishing the 40th volume of EC's quarterlies, *Review* and *Record* – archived along with other EC resources at our website: www.ECinc.org.

The Houghton Star at evangelical Houghton College published a gay-friendly editorial in October. Noting news of Christians' increasing welcome of gays, editor Holly Chaisson writes: "Regrettably, the church has historically struggled with being welcoming to groups that society itself has ostracized. Yet the church has learned from its mistakes." She says: "Instead of taking a moral high ground over the LGBTQ community, the church needs to welcome them as equals, something that cannot be achieved by mere tolerance or the avoidance of discrimination. Rather, the church needs to be active in not only accepting different sexual orientations, but also actually valuing them, recognizing too that everyone, including the LGBTQ community, has something to offer to the Christian community at large." She concludes her second installment with this observation: "If our image of God is so small that only heterosexuality is acceptable in his design of humanity, we have bigger worries than marriage equality."

David Gushee: "I am truly sorry that it took me so long to come into full solidarity with the Church's own most oppressed group". This eminent Baptist ethicist has written *Changing Our Mind: A Call from America's Leading Evangelical Ethics Scholar for Full Acceptance of LGBT Christians in the Church*. Gushee says he now seeks to stand with LGBT people "who have suffered the lash of countless Christian rejections." He'd long held a very different position but now says his work on issues of slavery, segregation, defamation of Jews and subjugation of

women – as well as the damage he's seen done to his lesbian sister by all the traditional antigay rhetoric – has prompted him to become an ally of all who've been oppressed because of their homosexuality.

Biblical understanding, he says, "involves head and heart, not just rational cogitation on scriptural exegesis. ... Time and again in the best moments of Christian history, an older or inadequate way of connecting the biblical dots gets shredded by transformative encounters with real human beings, often with real suffering human beings."

Southern Baptist blogger Jim Denison is upset over the increased welcome of gays in churches. He's alarmed that "four percent of white conservative evangelical churches permit gays in leadership roles." Along with Al Mohler, Russell Moore, David Platt and other antigay Southern Baptist preachers, Denison is sticking with what he calls, "what God actually says on this issue". However, Denison's version of "what God actually says on this issue" is contrary to how other conservative biblical exegetes and evangelical theologians understand the same few Bible verses.

Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, now admits he was wrong in "a couple of points" about homosexuality. "One of the embarrassments that I have to bear is that I have written on some of these issues for 30 years. At a couple of points, I've got to say I got that wrong, and we've got to go back and correct it." The leading Southern Baptist said: "Early in this controversy, I felt it quite necessary, in order to make clear the gospel, to deny anything like a sexual orientation. I repent of that."

Still, he insists there's no "third way": "A congregation will teach a biblical position on the sinfulness of same-sex acts, or it will affirm same-

sex behaviors as morally acceptable. Ministers will perform same-sex ceremonies, or they will not.” Some people hear in this the echoes of earlier Southern Baptists, when the issues were the Bible and *mixed-race congregations*, the Bible and *mixed-race dating*, the Bible and *mixed-race marriage* – not to mention the even earlier issues of *slavery* that split Southern Baptists from Baptists in the North.

Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore now rejects “reparative therapy”. At his Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission’s conference, he admitted that the “ex-gay” efforts were “severely counterproductive”. He told over a thousand evangelical pastors that they’d had an “inadequate view” of the matter. But his statements confused attendees since some of the speakers were presented as *having been* in “the gay lifestyle”.

Angered by Moore’s frankness and the honest confessions and apologies from former leaders of the now closed Exodus “ex-gay” movement, Chelsen Vicari of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, *unintentionally* confirmed Moore’s verdict while repeating tired “ex-gay” obfuscation, that gay men “are surrendering their sexual desires for a higher pursuit – and that is not heterosexuality, it’s healing”. Yet “healing” from *same-sex attraction* was promised. It’s what gays and their families thought “ex-gay” meant.

Justin Lee, founder of Gay Christian Network, was at Moore’s conference. “My goal here is to meet as many people as I can who disagree with me and talk over coffee.” Reared as a Southern Baptist, Lee started GCN for folks who support same-sex marriage as well as for those who’re committed to celibacy.

Jimmy Carter says: “I’m a Baptist, and I believe that each congregation is autonomous and can govern its own affairs. So if a local Baptist church wants to accept gay members on an equal basis, which my church does by the way, then that is fine. If a church decides not to, then government laws shouldn’t require them to.”

Perry Moore was the executive producer of the highly successful *Narnia* films from Walden Media. Moore, who suffered from chronic pain, died of

an overdose of pain medication in 2011. A devout Christian, he was in a same-sex life partnership with Hunter Hill. In 2013, Moore’s parents sued Hill for his half of the couple’s \$1.7 million New York apartment. In 2014, Manhattan Judge Debra James turned down the request, saying that while there was no documentation, “a promise may be implied where the property was transferred in reliance upon the confidential relationship.”

David Dahlin is the new CEO of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. For almost two decades he was with the Colorado Springs-based evangelical child development ministry, Compassion International, most recently as executive VP. A senior director at Compassion International describes Dahlin as “extremely warm, a very hospitable guy and really personable [who] did a really fine, fine job for us.”

Dahlin, 55, resigned from his job at CI, not wanting to create complications for the agency after acknowledging he’s “gay, was born gay.” For many years, he and his wife were in a mixed-orientation marriage and they decided they needed to divorce.

Mark Rupp is in a same-sex relationship and has been installed as pastor of Christian formation at Columbus Mennonite Church. Joel Miller, pastor of this Ohio congregation, says: “It’s significant that the same year the wider church adopted the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective it also adopted a statement called Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love”. He said: “We find disagreement to be a natural part of church life, and it is the hope of our congregation that when there is disagreement we can do so in a loving way.”

A 96-year-old retired Mennonite pastor’s credentials were terminated for conducting a backyard wedding for his gay son and his son’s partner of 27 years. Chester Wenger of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a pastor since 1949, “grieved deeply” when the Mennonites excommunicated his son 35 years ago. Now that the state has legalized same-sex marriage, the son asked his father to officiate and he “happily agreed”. Doing so defied a denominational rule: “Pastors holding credentials in a con-

ference of Mennonite Church USA may not perform a same-sex covenant ceremony.”

Wenger and his wife were foreign missionaries for 17 years, founding the Nazareth Bible Academy in Ethiopia and chairing Ethiopia’s Meserete Kristos Church, now the world’s largest Mennonite church.

“The Religious Right continues to tout, ‘We have thousands of ex-gay people’. [But, says Tim Rymel] The thousands do not exist.” This is how yet another former “ex-gay” leader puts it. For many years he was in leadership with the Love in Action “ex-gay” organization. He’s now written a book, *Going Gay*. This formerly married Pentecostal minister admits that neither he nor anyone else changed *sexual orientation* through the “ex-gay” agency. As other “ex-gays” have revealed, the “ex-gay” claims were obfuscation and lies. Rymel regrets that those who were pushed into “ex-gay” programs were treated as “political fodder” by the Religious Right.

“The question is not ‘Can a homosexual change?’ but ‘what might change look like.’ That, according to *Charisma* magazine’s continuing “ex-gay” claims will be about changing *behavior, belief, identity*, “demonic strongholds” and “family-line curses”.

A 2-day Presbyterian Church in America “Conference on Homosexuality” in Houston featured four heterosexually married clergy. Each of these four men was introduced by mention of his wife, children and pets. Publicity had noted that one man met his wife in college and “she quickly became his best friend”. Yet the conference theme was that Christians must believe that homosexuals must *refuse* to try to meet *their* intimacy needs in a same-sex partnership. Meeting sexual intimacy needs is reserved for heterosexuals. Ironically, the conference theme said: “the gospel imperative is to love our neighbor”. The rest of the command states that we should do it *as we love ourselves*.

“Regretfully it has come to our attention that you have been engaging in a homosexual lifestyle.” So began an “official notice of the process of formal

discipline” received by a gay young man who’s been a member of Faith Presbyterian Church, a congregation of the conservative Presbyterian Church in America. The letter went on to say that, “in the name of the Presbyterian Church in America [he is] hereby indicted on the charges of living out a lifestyle of sexual sin and falsely promoting this lifestyle as being in accordance with the Scriptures”. He’s told that his “lifestyle [is a] denial [of] the atoning power of Jesus’ sacrificial death and our hope of eternal life [since he’s rejected] God’s teaching on marriage [and] if this truth is denied then the atoning power of Jesus’ sacrificial death and our hope of eternal life must also be denied.” He was told to report to a meeting of the session, the congregation’s governing board.

The young man wrote back: “words cannot express just how disappointed I am”. He’d expected “a peaceful, kind-hearted parting of the ways. I did not expect an indictment, to be sure, and I surely did not expect one so mind-bendingly cold. ... I had every intention of leaving peacefully. For me, agreeing to disagree was enough.” He refers to the section on his salvation as “the most baffling part of the entire letter, wherein I see a new theology never one presented to me in my entire lifetime in the PCA. Apparently, belief in marriage between a man and a woman is necessary for salvation.”

He adds near the end of his letter: “If you want to know why so many people think the church is unwelcoming and unloving to gay people, THIS is why.”

While various national surveys find that over 60 percent of young unmarried evangelicals have been or are in a sexual relationship, the PCA insists on lifelong celibacy for the homosexually oriented.

“Faith and Freedom in the Public Square”, a panel hosted by The King’s College at New York’s Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA), featured radio talk show host Dennis Prager, author Eric Metaxas and Fox News contributor Kirsten Powers. Prager and Metaxas said that the most serious problems facing America were gay marriage and ISIS. Powers respectfully disagreed, voicing her support for same-sex marriage. Metaxas closed the evening saying that what Christians *do* is as important as what they *believe*,

that if a Christian knew that a person in the next room was being beaten and did nothing, the Lord would judge him. Later, two Christians who’re gay observed: “After two hours of bashing gay people, the unintended irony in that comment was hard to miss.”

Matt Stolhandske is an evangelical Christian, gay and a board member of Evangelicals for Marriage Equality. He’s raising funds to help Christian bakers Aaron and Melissa Klein pay fines levied against them for not baking a cake for a same-sex wedding. The Oregon Bureau of Labor fined them \$150,000 for violating a lesbian couple’s rights.

Stolhandske wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed: “To me, [the Kleins’ reading of the Bible is] a deeply harmful and embarrassing bastardization of our faith. But I don’t hate the Kleins.” In the spirit of Luke 6:27, he says he’ll “send whatever we raise along to the Klein family with a message of love and peace. I don’t want them to suffer”. He adds: “I am also pleading with them and other Christians to stop using the name of Jesus to explain to the LGBT community why we don’t deserve access to the civil rights afforded to heterosexuals through the legal institution of marriage.”

In this same spirit of the Golden Rule, Evangelicals Concerned, too, has donated funds to assist Christians who’ve been fined by the government for refusing to provide services for same-sex weddings.

A Pentecostal couple refuses to hold same-sex weddings in their Hitching Post wedding chapel in Idaho. Donald and Evelyn Knapp say that to do so would violate their Christian conscience. The ACLU sides with the Knapps. It will not pursue legal action since the Knapps provide *religious* service only and are thus exempted from the local ordinance. The ACLU will reconsider if the Hitching Post offers *secular* services such as flowers or wedding cake.

“Acceptable sins” are just as sinful as homosexuality – e.g., “sports on Sunday” and “over-consumeristic lifestyle”. So says Stephen Crotts, a North Carolina preacher. He claims that, “a person becomes a homosexual by *choice*”. And, he says, there’s a

“genetic predispositioning achieved [*after* the] choice”. Though Crotts denies “physical and psychological predispositioning”, he stereotypes Esau (“very hairy, an outdoorsman”) and Jacob (“a mama’s boy who loved to cook”) and thinks genetics can “come into play *as one makes sexual choices*”. Crotts deplors that “the best family and church can do is to hiss ‘It’s dirty! Just don’t do it!’”. But his own advice is: “Say ‘No’ quickly ... refuse to go ... envision the consequences ... Disease. Sin. Death. Detection. Such a vista of pain will give you incentive”. He admits that “change” is a “constant struggle ... [with] lots of tears and frustrations”.

The Right-wing’s Gary Bauer says the debate over same-sex marriage *isn’t* over. Yet, evangelical support for same-sex marriage has more than doubled over the past decade and 61 percent of young Republicans support it. Among young Democrats, that number is even larger. Bauer says polls aren’t accurate, that Americans are simply afraid to *voice* opposition. But when a poll goes *his* way, Bauer forgets this polling “problem”.

National Organization for Marriage is still fighting against marriage for same-sex couples. It’s already opposing marriage equality Republicans up for re-election in 2016: Sens. Rob Portman (Ohio), Mark Kirk (Illinois) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska). Some of the major pioneers of the ‘50s and ‘60s homophile rights movement were Republicans.

The future of conservatism was discussed at a recent panel of the conservative Manhattan Institute. One panelist, Bloomberg columnist Megan McArdle, said the battle over gay marriage is “over” and it’s time for conservatives to “move on”. The rest of the panel (all conservatives except for a gay “neo-liberal”) did not dissent on that.

Mormon Glenn Beck to Mormon Harry Reid after the midterm elections: “Harry Reid, you are right. The American people did send a message of work together, but it wasn’t about the policies of the Republicans and the Democrats. It was we want to work together as human beings. Stop separat-

ing us by class, stop separating us by sex, by who we sleep with, who we want to marry and stop separating us by color. We are all human beings.” The conservative pundit concluded: “Stop treating people like second-class citizens, no matter their color, creed, income, sex or sexuality. America’s had enough. Grow up.”

Kellogg’s is a pro-gay company and the Right-wing American Family Association doesn’t approve. Kellogg’s Tony the Tiger appears under a banner: “Wear your stripes with PRIDE” and “PRIDE is spelled in rainbow colors. Says the company spokesperson: “At Kellogg’s, [founded, incidentally, by Seventh-day Adventists in 1898] we’re an evolving culture that respects and accepts employees’ sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression so that all employees can be authentic and fully engaged”. Indeed, Kellogg’s is among the 81 percent of Fortune 500 companies that support LGBT rights. Says AFA: “We don’t think cereals and cartoons should be bypassing parents to speak about moral issues to children without permission from parents. If that was Kellogg’s intent then shame on them, and I hope parents take note of that.”

“God is not afraid of new things. That is why he is continuously surprising us, opening our hearts and guiding us in unexpected ways.” Pope Francis made this remark at the recent Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops on the Family. Concluding, Francis warned against five temptations he saw at work: a “hostile rigidity” that seeks refuge in the letter of the law; a “destructive do-goodism” based on a “false mercy,” which is a special temptation for “progressives and liberals”; transforming “bread into stone” and hurling it “against sinners, the weak and the ill” by imposing “impossible burdens”; coming down off the cross by “bending to the spirit of the world rather than purifying it”; and neglecting the “deposit of faith” by seeing oneself as its owner rather than its servant and neglecting reality by using “a smooth language in order to say a lot without saying anything.”

Celibate lesbian Roman Catholic Eve Tushnet comments in the *New York Post*: “The bishops heard the story of one Catholic family’s decision to wel-

come the son’s male partner, and the draft of the Synod’s ‘*relatio*’ (summary document) included startlingly positive language about gay couples. But the final version offered only a repetition of the church’s opposition to gay marriage and a chilly exhortation to ‘pastoral attention to people of homosexual orientation’. Even this couldn’t get a two-thirds majority of bishops. The bishops divided into two camps: those who think the church must focus on opposing all family structures that don’t follow Catholic sexual ethics, and those who think it must acknowledge the good done by gay couples. Neither camp is entirely right. Neither offers gay people a place *within* the church.” Says Tushnet: “Christian morality demands we welcome the stranger and cherish those who disagree with us. It demands honesty – to say that sexually active gays offer their partners ‘mutual aid to the point of sacrifice’. That phrase got stripped out of the synod’s final document, even though anybody who’s known a loving gay couple knows it’s true.”

“I’m proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me.” Tim Cook, Apple CEO said this in his first public acknowledgement of his homosexuality. The very private native Alabaman added: “I don’t consider myself an activist, but I realize how much I’ve benefited from the sacrifice of others. So if hearing that the CEO of Apple is gay can help someone struggling to come to terms with who he or she is, or bring comfort to anyone who feels alone, or inspire people to insist on their equality, then it’s worth the trade-off with my own privacy.” The next day Apple shares closed at an all-time high.

Vanguard University ended its participation in a reduced-tuition program with Orange County (California) after a complaint was filed alleging that the Assembly of God school’s position on homosexuality does not comply with the county position on diversity. The school had offered a 25 percent reduced tuition rate to county employees in exchange for advertising on the county’s internal web system. Though Vanguard will still offer tuition discounts to county employees through its “professional colleagues” program, “due to concerns voiced by a few coun-

ty citizens, Vanguard administrators conclude that it appears prudent to withdraw from the formal agreement so that the university and the county can continue to serve our community as faithful stewards and trusted advocates”.

Claremont McKenna College students read the Bible through the dogmatic jargon of Queer Theory. Such postmodernist twisting is demanded across the map of secular academia. At Swarthmore, students study “Queering God”. The course “seeks to stretch the limits of gendering.” “What role does architecture play in defining socially acceptable and unacceptable sexual relationships?” is a focus in “Gender, Sexuality, and the Built Environment” at Smith College. “Queer Theory and Gender Performativity” is an English class at Yale where the dogma is discussed as “power-knowledge”, “the deployment of alliance” and the “concept of the raw and the cooked”.

GQ reports thousands of rapes of males in the military. These are *not* the *loving gay relationships* so despised by antigay religionists. They’re *today’s* instances of *ancient* sex assaults that scholars now understand to be behind the Bible’s so-called “clobber verses”, e.g., savage rapes of slave boys, prisoners of war and the attempted sexual assault of sojourners at Sodom. If antigay religionists can find such rape revolting, maybe they can stop using Scripture’s attacks against *these ancient instances of assault* as ammunition against committed and loving same-sex couples today, peer partnerships that were never a part of a patriarchal culture where, to use a male peer as a mere woman would be to insult him with the grossest of abuse.

Gays should be stoned to death. This is the opinion of London’s leading Islamist, the former chairman of the Society of Muslim Lawyers, Anjem Choudary. He says that, in line with the teachings of the Quran, he doesn’t feel sorry for those who are stoned.

“Hey Liberals, It’s OK to Criticize Muslim Countries’ Treatment of Gays”, says Eric Sasson in *The New Republic*. Instead of “twist[ing] ourselves in knots trying not to offend”

Islam, this liberal writer sees that, “there is scant evidence of an openly gay populace, let alone examples of influential voices speaking up or influencing government policy to advance LGBT equality” in the Muslim world. He frankly admits that gays’ life under Islam “is characterized by silence, humiliation, shame and erasure” – not to mention *execution!*

Richard Dawkins keynoted a recent UK conference for secularism against the rise of religious fundamentalism. During the conference, tribute was paid to Samira Salih al-Naimi, the Iraqi human rights lawyer who was captured by ISIS, tortured for five days, and then murdered in the center of Mosul. Her story was told by Karima Bennoune, international law

professor at UC Davis and daughter of an Algerian academic who faced death threats in the 1990s for speaking out against Islamic fundamentalists. She noted that it’s Muslim men and women, gays and lesbians, scientists, dissenters and free speech advocates who are the front line victims of Sharia on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, in the US, liberal radio host Eric Michael Dyson refuses to get this. He rants: “There’s a lot of antsiness out here now because of ISIS and what people see on TV and yet at the same time, this is a religion that is ancient, that is honorable, that is venerable. Why is it that we get confused between the two?” He went on in self-contradiction, confusion and distortion: “We don’t do it with Christianity, because there is a lot of terrorism going

on and being promoted in the identity movement and white supremacists groups within Christianity itself.”

AND FINALLY:

“Why the millennials are leaving the church – And what we can do about it.” That’s the theme of a Fundamentalist Gen2Leadership Conference in January. Ironically, one keynoter is Ken Ham who teaches that the universe is only 6,000 years old and that people used to live among the dinosaurs. Six other antigay men will also take to the podium at the Creation Museum, site of the conference.