

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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Christianity Today's "most read article" in 2014 and in 2015 was on a gay issue. In 2014 it was on World Vision's decision to hire gay Christians in same-sex marriages – a policy quickly dropped in response to hostile donor backlash. In 2015 it was on *Obergefell v Hodges*, the Supreme Court's ruling on marriage for same-sex couples.

Barna Research's top story in its 2015 "Year in Review" was the Supreme Court's decision on marriage for same-sex couples. According to the evangelical pollster: "Active, practicing faith is more of a factor than either age or religious self-identification when it comes to supporting or opposing the Court's ruling. Just one-third of practicing Christians under the age of 40 (35%) favor the ruling, compared with three-quarters of non-practicing Christians under 40 (73%)."

***Obergefell v Hodges* ranks as No. 2 in the year's top ten news stories,** according to Bart Gingerich, managing editor of the Evangelical Channel at Patheos and a student at the Reformed Episcopal seminary. He says: "Many evangelical congregants now face anxiety over their jobs as their employers and workplaces have declared themselves openly hostile to biblical sexual mores, which are now labeled as bigotry." His No. 1 ranked news story is "**Continued Persecution of the Global Church**".

"We lost the entire culture war with that one decision!" That's what James Dobson, Focus on the Family founder, is telling his supporters about the Supreme Court's decision on marriage for same-sex couples. He says a "foreboding, black cloud" came over him a few days after the ruling, as he was "lying in bed and Shirley was not there yet."

Dobson seems not to catch the irony of his lament over a ruling that treats others as he and his wife and supporters

want to be treated, have been and still are treated, while they wage a culture war against others who wish to have the same structured rights for their marriage. Focus folks still refuse to take seriously the call to love others as themselves in summary of God's Law and Prophets. And their refusal is in the Name of the One who gave that summary and call.

Focus on the Family's Glenn Stanton has written, *Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor* (Moody Press). He says: "Sincere regard and warmth can take place between those who live at extreme ends of [the same-sex marriage] social chasm" and notes that he's learned this from his friendships with writer Jonathan Rauch and philosopher John Corvino, two conservatives who articulately defend marriage for same-sex couples. Even so, Stanton caricatures homosexuality as "a particularly evil lie of Satan".

Most American Christians (54%) say homosexuality should be accepted by society. This latest finding from Pew Research attributes the increase in acceptance to the views of the Millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996).

Evangelical trends have shifted between 2007 and 2014 as follows: from 16 to 26 percent in the Assemblies of God; from 31 to 40 percent in the Church of the Nazarene; from 41 to 49 in the Presbyterian Church in America (the shift in the mainline Presbyterian Church USA is 52 to 65); from 31 to 35 in the Churches of Christ; from 23 to 30 in the Southern Baptist Convention (the shift in the mainline American Baptist Convention is 40 to 54); from 23 to 27 in the Seventh-day Adventists and from 44 to 56 in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (the shift in the mainline Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is 56 to 73). In

historically black churches, the shift has been 54 to 61 in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and 35 to 54 in the National Baptist Convention.

"If I die and someone stands up at my funeral and says nothing but, 'Ed Dobson loved homosexuals', I would feel proud." That's what an editor of Jerry Falwell's old *Fundamentalist Journal* and Moral Majority and a Liberty University administrator, later told evangelical leader Philip Yancey. Dobson passed away in 2015 after living with ALS for fifteen years. After he left the Religious Right, Dobson led his Grand Rapids church in reaching out to local gays, especially to men living with HIV.

In 2013, his son Daniel, who'd serve in the war in Iraq, came out to his parents: "Mom, Dad, I'm gay. And I still love Jesus. And nothing else changes." His father responded: "We still love you. And nothing else changes."

Lyle Schaller, the prominent church consultant, died in 2015. In a *Christianity Today* tribute to Schaller, Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, wrote: "No one may have advised more churches in the 20th century. Mine was one." Another of the churches that Schaller helped was the big MCC-founded Cathedral of Hope in Dallas. Michael Piazza, the church's former dean, recalls that Schaller was the *only* church consultant willing to help that predominantly gay congregation. One of the Schaller sons, Sasha Alyson, is gay. He started the Boston gay paper, *Bay Windows*, and has been writing and producing a worldwide trove of gay and lesbian affirming literature.

The National Catholic Reporter has named an interracial gay couple "Persons of the Year". *NCR* says that this gay Catholic couple, Greg Bourke and Michael DeLeon of Louisville,

Kentucky, “tell the story of the benefits of same-sex marriage”. Together for over 30 years, they were able to marry in Canada in 2004. For over 15 years they’ve been rearing two racially diverse children, now teenagers, who both attend a Catholic school. In a piece written by all four of them, they say: “A good parent is a good parent, a loving family a loving family, we’re blessed to be and have both!”

Southern Baptist Seminary president Albert Mohler now admits that the long discredited “ex-gay” and “reparative therapy” efforts do not change homosexual orientation to heterosexual.

In 2004, after many decades of “ex-gay” fraud and failure, Mohler denounced the American Psychological Association’s refutation of “ex-gay” claims. And in 2005 he faulted *Christian* opposition to “ex-gay” claims, accusing Christian critics of holding a “psychological worldview that is directly at odds with the worldview of the Bible.”

At a Southern Seminary conference, Mohler confessed: “The Christian Church has sinned against the LGBT community by responding to this challenge in a superficial way.” He admits: “It’s not something that is so simple as converting from homosexual to heterosexual”. Mohler, along with Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors insist on celibacy for all homosexuals.

Commenting, Alan Chambers, Exodus International president from 2001 until he oversaw the “ex-gay” network’s closing in 2013, observes: “It’s kind of a doublespeak. They want to be against what is publicly recognized as the most damaging sort of thing out there. But, they talk out of the other side of their mouth and support this. I think some of them are confused, but I think, for the most part, whether you’re for or against reparative therapy, they’re saying the same thing. They’re saying that to be acceptable to God you should do *this*. While they may not promote counseling sessions aimed at orientation change, they may endorse a

prayer time that’s meant to accomplish the same thing. I’m not sure there’s a difference. The end result is the same in that we are causing people to feel ashamed of something they can’t control. We’re causing them to feel shame because they haven’t changed something that’s unchangeable and that is orientation. Regardless of how someone decides to steward their orientation, whether they want to opt for celibacy, monogamy or you name it, that’s up to an individual.”

Zondervan has published Alan Chambers’ new book, *My Exodus: From Fear to Grace*. Of his over two decades in Exodus International – with an annual budget of more than \$1 million and over 400 organizations in 17 countries – Chambers is clear: “I never saw one of our members or other Exodus leaders or other Exodus members become heterosexual, so, deep down I knew that it wasn’t true.”

This has been the witness of all the other ex-“ex-gay” leaders going back to the mid-1970s. But, the Religious Right has not wanted to hear of failures and frauds and has engaged in well-funded cover-ups while turning millions away from what they were misled to think was Evangelical Christian faith. Many are now among the “nones” – outside any religious affiliation whatsoever. Some, however, have been led to same-sex welcoming and affirming support groups such as Evangelicals Concerned, Gay Christian Network and The Evangelical Network.

The Atlantic features Alan Chambers in “The Downfall of the Ex-gay Movement”. Christian journalist Jonathan Merritt, who wrote the article, notes that, “in a chapter intended for the memoir but cut by the publisher” (Zondervan), Chambers had written: “Every part of my life, all of my compartmentalization is reconciled. My message and story are no longer different depending on the group to whom I’m speaking.”

The Atlantic reports that, when Exodus closed in 2013, a “Pew Research poll showed that only 36 percent of Americans believed a gay or lesbian person’s orientation can be changed. ...[M]odern science had delivered crushing blows to the ex-gay movement with peer-reviewed research

showing that its ideology was bunk.” Even “the school newspaper for Jerry Falwell-founded Liberty University has editorialized against it.”

Says Chambers: “Heterosexuals don’t have a corner on the market of healthy, holy relationships. ... I look at gay and lesbian people who are in committed relationships and I believe they can reflect the image of God.”

The Religious Right’s *World* magazine is embarrassed by Chambers’ honesty. In its push of “ex-gay” claims, *World* celebrating Chambers as its “Daniel of the Year” in 2011. Now, *World* editor Marvin Olasky decries Chambers’ closing of Exodus and his having “abandoned” what Olasky stubbornly dubs “that biblical concept”. *World* mocks Chambers’ supposedly “reap[ing] the joy of approval from some gays who formerly detested him”. *World* still pushes “ex-gay” propaganda, however less explicitly.

Refusing to learn from the tragedies of “ex-gay” and “reparative” efforts, antigay Robert Gagnon and self-proclaimed “ex-lesbian” activist, Anne Paulk, formerly married to now ex-“ex-gay” activist John Paulk, still push “ex-gay” claims. They’ve set up a new group called, “Restored Hope”, and call their critics “mockers”. They fault those who, they say, “initially communicate a desire to change [and then get] exasperated” when the same-sex attractions don’t change. They say these folks “demand that a local ministry or God himself change their attractions.” Well, that’s the “change” that Exodus promised – and never delivered – for over four decades.

(Cf. Ralph Blair’s reviews of Gagnon’s book at www.ecinc.org/review-fall-2002-vol-27-no-4/; John Paulk’s “ex-gay” book at www.ecinc.org/review-fall-1998-vol-23-no-4/; and John Paulk’s rejection of “ex-gay” claims at www.ecinc.org/record-summer-2013/).

The Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University has approved a major document on homosexuality. Its authors cite SDA prophetess, Ellen White, in the 100th year since her death in 1915, on what they think resembles same-sex marriage today: “Never did vice lift its deformed head with such

boldness.” The document relies heavily on Robert Gagnon’s book.

While going on at length about grace that should be shown to homosexuals, the SDA document is uncompromising in its blunt conclusion: “Throughout the Bible, God unequivocally upholds the Creation plan for male and female (Gen 1:26) and the ideal of marriage between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:8). Divine judgment is pronounced against those who depart from this norm and that includes homosexual practice.”

One of the latest of the ex-“ex-gay” leaders is Jayne Ozanne. She now accepts her same-sex orientation and renounces her involvement in the “ex-gay” movement in the UK. Today, she is the Director of Accepting Evangelicals, a same-sex supportive organization for evangelical Christians in the UK.

Psychiatrist Robert Spitzer has died at 83. He was a leading figure in the American Psychiatric Association’s response to the scientific data that led to important revisions throughout the entire *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973.

The most explosive revision was on homosexuality. Religious Right and LGBT lobbies have frequently distorted the basis of this APA removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder – the former blaming and the latter crediting “gay activists”. But homosexuality was dropped for failing to meet the *DSM’s* overall requirements for a mental disorder. That is, every mental disorder listed must inevitably be associated with both *subjective distress* and *social dysfunction*. Obviously – and especially absent social tyranny against homosexuals – homosexuality does not meet this double criterion. Had homosexuality per se been retained in the *DSM*, it would have been the *only* category that did not meet the criterion of a *mental disorder*.

In 2012, Spitzer responded to antigay lobbies that misused his name to endorse “ex-gay” therapy. He said that since “ex-gay” testimonies were mere *claims* of change with no objective

criteria to back them up, “How do you know someone has really changed?”

Wesley Hill, a gay Christian committed to celibacy, was an invited plenary speaker at the Evangelical Theological Society’s 2015 meeting in November. He teaches at the Trinity School for Ministry, a conservative Anglican seminary near Pittsburgh. The title of Hill’s talk, “Washed and Still Waiting”, played on the title of his 2010 Zondervan book, *Washed and Waiting*. Speaking from his everyday experience, and well aware of the loneliness of celibacy, he told the ETS members quite frankly: “If gay and lesbian Christians are to be able to embrace long-term sexual abstinence, they need more than biblical theology. They need their fellow believers to help them face the pastoral and practical questions of the lived experience of celibacy in the midst of ongoing sexual desire.”

Hill posts on Twitter that he ended his lecture by saying that, “in thirty, forty, or fifty years – please God – those gay and lesbian believers who are washed in the waters of baptism and waiting for the resurrection of the dead will be those who are washed and *still* waiting, still persevering in the hope of eternal life.”

The Evangelical Theological Society passed four antigay resolutions at its 2015 meeting, even though, as co-drafter Rob Schwarzwalder of Family Research Council admits, ETS very seldom adopts *any* resolutions. Antigay Southern Baptist bloggers Denny Burk and Owen Strachan pushed these resolutions to counter increasing numbers of evangelicals who support marriage for same-sex couples.

Historian Randall Balmer, formerly with *Christianity Today* and now the Chair of the Dartmouth University Department of Religion, observes: “Evangelicals are moving on this issue rather dramatically, as is the rest of the culture.”

Since marriage is now legal for same-sex couples, waiting until marriage is the aim of some young gay and lesbian evangelical Christians. Gay

evangelical activist Matthew Vines grew up in a church where waiting until marriage was normal. So, he says, he sees no reason not to apply that after coming out as gay. A new group within the Gay Christian Network is called, “Waiting Until Marriage”. It was launched “to support and encourage GCN members who have chosen to reserve sex for a life-long committed relationship (marriage).”

Chase Stephens of *The Daily Wire* comments: “Staying celibate before marriage is an antiquated notion these days because skyrocketing STDs, 3,000 abortions a day, above 50% divorce rates, and millions of fatherless children have taught us that we know better than previous generations. But”, he says, “one group of Americans is boldly standing for abstinence until marriage: homosexual Christians. The problem”, though, is that “some in the gay community, particularly the religious, are finding it difficult to maintain their abstinence before marriage because of a lack of support from the [wider] homosexual community”.

Philip Yancey says the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities “escaped a predicament”. He notes the news of “two Mennonite colleges [that] withdrew their membership [from CCCU]. The two schools had decided to allow faculty and staff to be in same-sex marriages. If they had not withdrawn, conservative schools would have quit the association in protest.” Yancey observes: “I find this fascinating. Mennonites, Amish, and other Anabaptist groups are total pacifists, which means they view all killing, including warfare, as a form of murder. Yet every evangelical association I know of includes Anabaptist denominations at the table. I am not a pacifist. I wonder, though, how difficult it must be for such pacifists to meet regularly with leaders whom they view as badly mistaken on a life-and-death issue.”

Yancey continues: “Sexual practice is an important moral issue, of course. But how is it that evangelical organizations will not countenance members who have differing views on that issue, yet welcome those with differing views

on war and killing?” He asks: “Does anyone else sense an inconsistency here?”

Grand Canyon University is extending spousal benefits to the same-sex partners of employees. This evangelical Christian school is doing so “as a way of demonstrating grace and compassion toward individuals and families”. While GCU is committed to its belief “that the Bible is clear about marriage being a sacred union between a man and a woman, [its] steadfast commitment [is] to follow the example of Jesus who consistently showed kindness and compassion to all, regardless of worldview or lifestyle, while speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). At some points Christ infuriated religious leaders and at other points He drew the wrath of secular authorities, yet He continued to minister to all without fail.”

The GCU statement cites Romans 14 and Matthew 7:12, putting the school’s benefits policy into the context of Paul’s instructions on Christian liberty and Jesus’ summation of the Law and Prophets in loving others as we love ourselves. “In summary”, states GCU’s announcement’s citing Romans 12:18, “as much as possible, so far as it depends on us, we will strive to live peaceably with all in hopes that we may continue to share the love of Christ with those who embrace the Christian worldview as well as those who do not.”

Jared Byas, a graduate of Westminster Seminary and a former GCU philosophy faculty member, affirms: “My faith requires that I stand up for equality and with people who do not enjoy the same rights that I do.” Therefore, this heterosexual evangelical, married with four children, supports marriage for gay couples. He’s in line with Westminster’s founder, J. Gresham Machen, who did not believe that Christians should sit in judgment and dictate what the general citizenry was to do or not do.

The Calvin College Chimes has published a feature on the same-sex marriage of two Calvin alums. In

December, Calvin’s official student newspaper reported that, after years of struggle and isolation, Zack and Colby Roanhorse say: “Everyone around us now knows us as ‘husbands’ – and not only husbands, but Christian husbands. ... God takes precedence in both of our lives.” Colby recalls the moment when, in a Calvin residence hall prayer room, he asked God to show him what he should do and he felt the Holy Spirit’s presence: “A feeling I can’t explain, that intense peace and reassurance and it was only in the Holy Spirit that I felt it. It was just intoxicating and fulfilling and I knew that I was not in the wrong.”

Nonetheless, a *Chimes* Editor’s Note clarified the official position of the College and its Christian Reformed denomination: “Homosexuality is a condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world. ... Homosexuality (that is, explicit homosexual practice), however, is incompatible with obedience to God.”

Federal Title IX Exemptions regarding LGBT issues were sought and received by 37 Christian colleges by the end of 2015. They include Covenant College, Geneva College, George Fox University, Howard Payne University, Liberty University, North Greenville University, Oklahoma Baptist University, Southern Wesleyan University, Spring Arbor University, Tabor College and Toccoa Falls College. Pending review were 22 schools including Asbury University, Biola University, Dordt College, Hardin-Simmons University, Multnomah University and Southern Nazarene University.

Fisher Humphreys has published an essay on EC founder Ralph Blair in *Christian Ethics Today*, a publication of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Humphreys is Professor of Divinity, Emeritus, of Samford University and has been an EC summer retreat keynoter. (For Humphreys’ essay, cf. www.ChristianEthicsToday.com)

“Faith Driven Consumers make daily decisions in the context of their biblical worldview.” So say launchers of a drive to boycott or “buycott” businesses on the basis of their “Christian-friendliness”. They say they’ve learned from tactics of LGBT lobbies.

Someone sent the group some reminders: “ ‘But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you’ and ‘Forgive us ... as we forgive them’”.

“It’s still Kim Davis as a lead on half the gay rags of the country and beyond.” *Gay City News* published lesbian activist Kelly Cogswell’s critique of the media’s incessant drumbeating against Davis. It’s “Mostly because she’s so easy to hate. She’s a woman, after all, and from rural Kentucky. Her garden-variety bigotry gives you license to make jokes about hillbillies and incest, rednecks and Possum Bottom Kentucky Honeymoon Lodge and Bait shop. You get to rant smugly about her stupidity and backwardness and ignorant accent. ... And when you get tired of Kentucky-bashing Kim Davis, you get to ridicule her body and her hair.” Cogswell is the author of *Eating Fire: My Life as a Lesbian Avenger* (University of Minnesota Press).

Cal Thomas says Kim Davis “looks more like a religious fanatic than a martyr”. A former leader in the now defunct Moral Majority, Thomas asserts in his Fox News essay: “Let’s get something straight. America has never been a ‘Christian nation’. Those who believe otherwise have an obligation to say what part of our history was uniquely Christian. Was it when slavery was legal? How about when women were denied the vote? The Gilded Age? The Roaring ‘20s?” He notes: “Amazingbible.org lists more than 600 sins mentioned in the Bible, including adultery, fornication, divorce and lying. If Davis wants to be consistent she would refuse a marriage license for anyone who has sinned, which would limit the number of applications to zero”. He cites Romans 3:23.

Christians should not attend a same-sex wedding – even of their own child. That’s the advice of Southern Baptist Seminary president Albert Mohler. He warns that such attendance would signal “moral approval” in his new book, *We Cannot Be Silent*. He grants that boycotting the weddings of friends and loved-ones can be “excruciatingly difficult”, but, he demands, it’s what Christians *must do*. “At some point, attendance will involve congratulating the couple for their union. If you can’t congratulate the couple, how can you attend?” So: “Going to [such a] ‘wedding’ is the one thing we can’t do.”

“Jesus would be all for attending a same-sex marriage ceremony”, according to the popular evangelical radio talk show host Stephen Arterburn. This best-selling author of *Every Man’s Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Temptation* says he “extrapolates” this conclusion from Jesus’ example of dining with prostitutes and drunkards.

Shock headline from Religious Right blogger: “Father seeks right to marry adopted son”. But that’s misleading.

After living together as a lovingly committed same-sex couple for 40 years, two unrelated gay men (now 78 and 68) wanted to marry legally. But marriage was not a legal option in 2012. So, to express their commitment to each other, the elderly couple settled for legal *adoption*. Since the Supreme Court has now ruled that same-sex marriage is legal, the couple wants to get legally married.

This is what Gene Veith, antigay *World* magazine columnist, implies is some sort of incest. And he gets the outraged feedback expected from his Rightwing fans.

The couple’s judge in the Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Common Pleas Court showed empathy. While denying the couple’s request because of their status under the *prior* legal arrangement, he expressed he’s “sensitive to the situation [and] welcomes direction from our appellate courts”.

“Under the Fidel Castro regime, Cuba had, over many years, a deplorable record on gay rights”, as New York’s *Gay City News* reports without exaggeration. The paper says Castro’s “treatment of people living with HIV and AIDS” was no less “deplorable”. Now, under Raul Castro, are things any better? It’s said that his daughter is Cuba’s “leading LGBT activist”, but according to *Gay City News*, many “have grumbled that her work is window-dressing for a still hostile regime”.

The New York Times reports that America’s African campaign of pro-gay support has produced a backlash of antigay repression there. Contrary to accusations from LGBT activists in the US – that the antigay atmosphere in Africa is caused by *antigay* American preachers – African antigay repression springs from indigenous homophobia of longstanding. It’s been stirred up by the hundreds of millions of US dollars being spent to bring gay rights to sub-Saharan Africa.

“It cannot get any worse than being gay in Syria today.” *The Sydney Morning Herald* quotes a human-rights campaigner: “If you are gay, you have many enemies intent on your persecution: the government, Islamic State, *al-Nusra* [the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda]. That’s not including your own extended family; they are often enemy number one.”

The report says: “On the table in front of us is an untidy ring-binder detailing the torture that has been inflicted on gay men in Syria. Methods include the *shabeh*, which roughly translates as ‘the ghost’ and involves handcuffing the victims’ arms behind their backs and using them to hoist their bodies into the air, putting extreme pressure on the shoulder sockets, often until they pop out. Other men accused of being gay, who have been abducted in the night by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s agents, describe being placed, helpless and motionless, inside the rims of large tires and brutalized with electrodes and iron bars. The testimony of one teenager details, in spi-

dery writing, how he had his testicles smashed with a hammer by a member of the Syrian Republican Guard.” And ISIS throws gay men off tall buildings to their deaths on the rocks below.

AND FINALLY:

Texas Congressman Louie Gohmert proposed a condescending “experiment” during a recent address at Liberty University. He said: “How about if we take four heterosexual couples, and put them on an island where they have everything they need to live and exist, and we take four couples of just men and put them on an island where they have all they need to survive. And then let’s take four couples of just women and put them on an island, and then let’s come back in 100 years and see which one nature favors.”

But, it was not until 1967, when Gohmert was 14, that this Southern Baptist’s state of Texas had its law against *interracial* marriage overturned by the Supreme Court’s *Loving v Virginia*. And there, in Virginia, almost a half-century later, Gohmert was making wisecracks against same-sex marriage. *Loving* overturned laws in fifteen other states. Gohmert was at Liberty University, founded by Jerry Falwell, a former segregationist preacher who’d angrily predicted that racial integration “will destroy our race”.

State laws that succumbed to *Loving* held that “blacks and whites cannot possibly have any progeny [for] natural instinct revolts at race mongrelizing as wrong.” Those so-called Racial Integrity Acts were justified to prevent “abominable mixture and spurious issue”. It was claimed that “race-mixing [was] scientifically unsound and would pollute America with mixed-blood offspring.”

Still, Bernie Sanders has been among the invited speakers at Liberty University. He addressed the student body on September 14th. So Liberty seems at liberty to cope with some diversity of views – in stark contrast to “progressive” schools that ban speakers who aren’t “politically correct”.